MAY 1st ISSUE, 1928
VOL. LXVI No. 4

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Cover Design by Charles Durant *Headings by Walter DeMaris*

Published twice a month by The Butterick Publishing Company, Butterick Building, New York, N. Y., U. S. A. Joseph A. Moore, Chairman of the Board; S. R. Latshaw, President; Levin Rank, Secretary and Treasurer; Anthony M. Rud, Editor. Entered as Second Class Matter, October 1, 1910, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Additional entry at Chicago, Illinois. Yearly subscription $4.00 in advance. Single copy, Twenty-five Cents, in Canada Thirty Cents. Foreign postage, $2.00 additional. Canadian postage, 75 cents. Trade Mark Registered: Copyright, 1928, by The Butterick Publishing Company in the United States and Great Britain.

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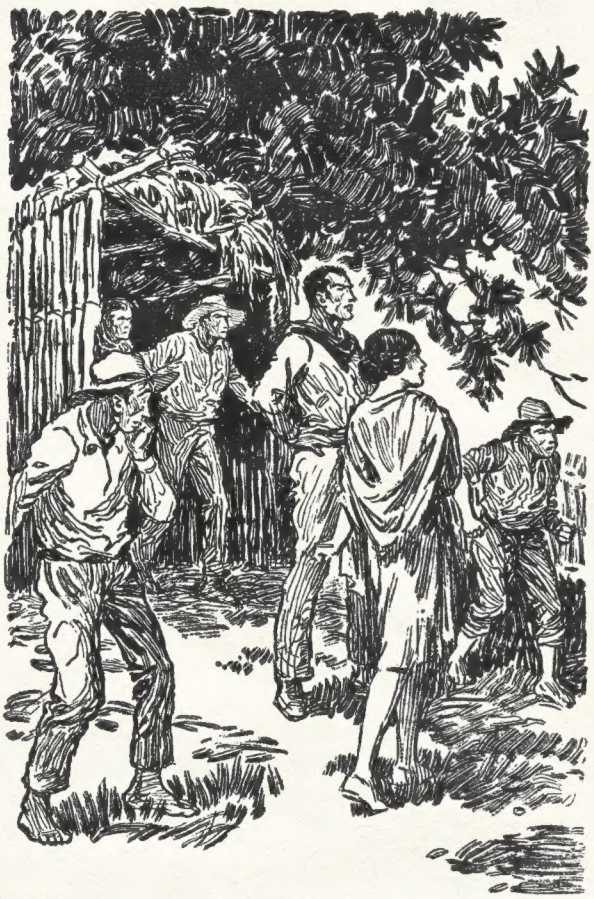


COINCIDENCE

PROLOGUE

"HOMBRE, I hate that word!" erupted Sixto Scott.

As I stared, he continued:

"Yes, I mean the word 'coincidence' that just dropped off your tongue. Why? Well, maybe because I know a smart fool down in Ciudad Bolívar who always uses it when I spin some yarn of odd things that have happened up this Orinoco. Or maybe it's because I don't believe that things usually called 'coincidence' are mere chance. No, sir! I've seen too many things come about — things which looked accidental, and couldn't be logically connected as cause and effect, but yet had a direct bearing on one another—to dismiss them with that lazy explanation."

I frowned, a trifle ruffled by his blunt attack on the casual word which had ended a short tale of mine; more irritated by the conclusion of his unexpected retort. As my scowl deepened, he asserted:

"That's what I said. Lazy! And it's what I mean, too. It's the explanation of a man too lazy to use his brains and figure the thing out—or too conceited to confess that he hasn't brains enough to explain it any other way, or too obstinate to admit the existence of an unseen power that fixes up such matters at the end. Now don't get sore. I didn't mean you. I'm talking about the world in general. What little I've seen of that world in general has convinced me that it's populated mostly by know-it-alls. Maybe that's one of the reasons why I like to live among the Guahibo Indians, who don't think they know everything, rather

Bandit of the Orinoco Jungles

By
ARTHUR O. FRIEL

than among town folks who believe they've learned all there is."

A silence ensued. As guest aboard his *piragua*—a guest picked up off the river-bank, worn out by an arduous exploring trip into the harsh Guayana mountains —I should be showing little appreciation of hospitality by taking offense at his momentary heat. Moreover, I knew the big trader well enough by this time to understand that no affront was intended. We had cruised together for days and had long passed the point where we felt the necessity for continual diplomacy of speech.

Now we lolled on the sun-beaten deck and gazed absently elsewhere, each thinking. My eyes rested temporarily on the swart, stocky Guahibos who formed his crew: aborigines of the untamed Vichada country wherein my huge companion made his home. Sixto, narrow lidded in the hot glare, contemplated the eastern shore of the wide river, where a yellowish palm hut showed indistinctly against the eternal green of trees. After a minute or two my gaze followed his, to note that little house subconsciously and then travel along the featureless bank.

"Well, there's something in the last part of what you said," I conceded. "There are plenty of know-it-alls in the world, sure enough. Too many. But, to get back to the real point, have you the nerve to claim that each and every coincidence is worked out beforehand by that unseen power you mentioned?"

"Oh, no." Sixto chuckled, with his usual good humor. "That would cover too much territory. There are things

that just happen, of course, For instance, you happened to use that word and stir me up just as we're passing Babilla Flaca, and that's a coincidence in itself; but I don't believe anybody, seen or unseen, arranged to have you do it. It wasn't worth arranging. But on the other hand, *amigo*, a thing once came about right over yonder that certainly looked as if it had been worked out beforehand—and not by any mortal mind, either. I'll tell you about it, and you can form your own judgment. But first take another look at Babilla Flaca—what there is of it—before it fades out. You'll have to squint hard to see it even now."

I squinted. So tiny and insignificant was the settlement that it appeared unworthy of a name—even of the contemptuously descriptive one it bore: Lank Flank. Obviously it was a spot so poor that its few inhabitants could not coax from its parched soil enough sustenance to round out their lean bodies. But for the Orinocan penchant for attaching some apt appellation to every *sitio*, it would have gone undesignated; for it was no town, nor even a hamlet—no, not even a house of mud; only a crude shelter constructed from poles and fronds, the abode of utter poverty. For a minute or two it remained visible; then some intervening tree blotted it out. After a bored glance along the monotonous line of clay and trees stretching on northward, I looked again at Sixto.

Any sort of tale would be a welcome relief from the monotony of the journey—and I knew Sixto enjoyed fame as a story teller.

Under the shadow of his palm strip sombrero, his deep brown eyes still dwelt on the inscrutable tree line, as if seeing there far more than I. After a time he lifted a big sunbrowned hand to run it thoughtfully across his blackbearded jaw; cast a perfunctory look aloft to assure himself that the dingy sail was drawing well; altered the position of his gigantic frame on the hot deck, and spoke in reminiscent tone.

CHAPTER I

MATANZA

OVER there at Babilla Flaca once lived eight people named Carasquel: father and mother, their five sons, and their one daughter, named Margarita, or Rita for short. And away up at San Fernando de Atabapo lived Tomás Funes, the hellion whose army of cutthroats terrorized the whole upper Orinoco for eight years. And at Atures, where the rapids and the Territorio de Amazonas both begin, was Funes' first garrison; first, I mean, on the way upstream. And in charge of that garrison, for some time, was one Sergeant Matanza. Probably that wasn't his real name—quite a few of the Funes men had left their original names behind them somewhere—but it served well enough. It means "massacre", among other things; and it fitted him, as you'll see before I finish.

Well, there are your *dramatis personae*. That's the right term, isn't it? I thought so. Living among Indians a few years, a chap forgets most of his college education.

Matanza was the first one of the lot whom I met. I was coming down with my usual cargo of Indian hammocks to sell at Bolívar and, of course, had to move my stuff overland around the rapids—and past the Funes garrison. That garrison was not so big as it had been, because Funes had gotten his grip so firmly fixed on the upper river that a small force under a *sargento* now could hold the outpost secure enough. And the *sargento* was Matanza.

He was a pale fellow, very thin, and probably dyspeptic; his men said he ate hardly enough to keep a bird alive. When I first saw him I was surprised by his frail appearance. The Funes gang in general were hard eggs, and a garrison commander had to be harder, and usually looked it. And when a boss bandit's name indicates that he is a wholesale killer you naturally look for a great brawny brute—something like me, perhaps. So this chap seemed

a misfit—that is, at first sight. But after looking at him a second time and hearing his voice and observing his motions you'd realize that he was more dangerous than you'd thought him.

I had heard his name before we met, but nothing else about him. The corporal in charge at Salvajito, the upper end of the portage, was feeling glum and grumpy about something when I landed there. He told me who was commandant now, and that was all. The driver of the bullock carts, a thick headed peon, was dumb as a fish. So I proceeded, as usual, to Atures, where headquarters were; then walked over to the mud house where the commandant always lived, and where all travelers had to give an account of themselves—and, if they carried anything worth taking, to submit to more or less robbery. In my own case this call was usually just a formality, because it was well known that I was a Colombian, not a Venezuelan, and that I seldom brought down anything but hammocks, not worth taking from me. But the call had to be made. So I made it.

A couple of soldiers were lounging at the door, talking; a lanky one and a stocky one. They looked like ordinary privates, one with a rifle and one without any visible weapons, I concluded that the heavy fellow with the gun was the usual headquarters sentry and the other just some *camarada* of his, off duty; also that the discipline here was not so strict as it had been, or that the commandant was away somewhere. On my previous trip through there, when a captain was in charge, the sentry had been stiff as a tree and no loafer had been allowed to talk to him while he was on post.

"Where is the commandant?" I asked the man with the gun, ignoring the lanky fellow.

"Here!" snapped the thin-face. "What do you want?"

I stared. I looked him up and down and almost laughed. But when I saw his eyes again I didn't laugh. They were hard as gun muzzles; and his voice had sounded like the scrape of a machete on a stone. And the eyes gave me a sort of chill, as if a rifle had been suddenly pressed against my forehead. No, I wasn't scared; I don't scare easily. But I didn't feel like laughing, either.

"Are you Matanza?" I asked.

Probably my voice sounded incredulous, and maybe a bit contemptuous. His eyes hardened still more.

"I am Sergeant Matanza, commandant of Atures," he shot back at me. "What do you want, Scott?"

I stared again. He knew who I was, though I had never seen him before, or the sentry either. Both of them were new there since my last trip. After looking from one to the other and back, I said:

"Nothing at all. It happens to be the custom to stop here for inspection of cargoes and report of news. Aside from that," I ended, warming up a bit, "I have no interest in this place or in anybody connected with it."

That wasn't a wise remark, perhaps. But I'm not very diplomatic, especially when my temper begins to slip; and sometimes it takes very little to start it slipping. It slipped considerably farther in the next few seconds.

Those cold eyes of Matanza's bored clear into the back of my brain. And then says he, with a grin as thin as the edge of a knife:

"I know the custom. I know you, and all about you. I know your cargo is nothing but hammocks and your news is nothing but Indian gossip. You can take both down the river, and the sooner the better. *Vaya!*"

With that he turned a shoulder to me and resumed talking to the sentry, as if I had vanished from the place. And I stood there taking one more stare. How in the devil's name had he learned who I was before I appeared there, and how did he know that I was not trying to smuggle through some gold, or something else worth seizing, in one of my sacks? And where did he get those contemptuous airs of his? He could have been no more insolent if he had been commander of the

whole Funes army, instead of *sargento* of a far outpost.

I felt like giving him a swift lift off the ground on the toes of my *alpargatas*, and for a second I came near doing it. But just then the heavy chap caught my eye, giving me a look of warning as plain as a yell; and I realized that I'd only make myself a fool—not to say a corpse—by acting hot headed. So I turned to go my way. Before I had taken a step, though, I stopped short.

Matanza, talking in a bored way, suddenly snatched the sentry's gun and fired. The thing took place so swiftly that he was handing back the rifle before I knew just what he had done. The shot startled me, of course; and my first thought was that he had let go at my back—though that was absurd, for I'd have been too dead to think of anything in that case. As I spun around I saw him looking at something a little way off.

"That cursed carrier of fleas will leave no more of them here," he said very casually. "As I was saying, soldier, those women of San Carlos are—"

He went on talking as if nothing had happened. Then I saw, a few yards off, a dog lying dead on the ground, shot behind the shoulder. It was a female, and heavy with pups. Matanza had massacred mother and babies with one bullet.

The heavy fellow chuckled. I looked at him, his boss, the dog, and several men who had popped out of other houses to learn what the shot meant. Matanza ignored me and every one else, and after a few calls and laughs from the other men everything was quiet. Vultures dropped to lunch on the dog meat. And I started my cargo on its way to the lower post and walked along with it, thinking things over as I went.

The loose discipline at Atures didn't mean inefficiency, I could see. Matanza had his own system and, though it might look slack, it worked. That corporal over at Salvajito, I remembered, had kept close watch on the loading of the carts, and had punched a few of the sacks with his fist—sacks which happened to bulge a bit and look irregular. He must have sent some man overland by a short route, while I was traveling the winding cart road, to report me at headquarters. And there at headquarters, as likely as not, was some garrison book in which the names of regular river travelers were kept, along with various notations about them.

Old Man Funes, who used to be a river trader before he seized control of the Territory, was fond of keeping books on everything, and probably made his commandants do likewise. Anyway, this man Matanza had some means of knowing who and what I was, and what I was carrying, before he saw me. So he could afford to be supercilious when I arrived. He knew my bags held nothing worth the effort of inspecting.

As for his insolent attitude, the reason for that probably lay in the fact that he was only a *sargento*, and a poor specimen of physical manhood besides. Knowing he was inferior, he tried to balance things by acting superior. People do that, you know. Because he was of low rank, he put on more arrogance than if he had been higher up; and because he was half my size, he was twice as nasty to me as if he had been big. And probably the same rule held good with everything he did. Because he was skinny and unhealthy and generally unimpressive in appearance, he was far more cruel and dangerous than if he had been well built and good looking. At least, that was how I figured it out. And I was all the more convinced of this by his shooting of the dog.

That, I felt, had been done to impress me; to make me feel that he was both hard and dangerous. If that was his object, he had succeeded. The speed and sureness of that shot proved him a bad risk to monkey with. And his casual way of murdering that little mother showed him to be as cold blooded as a *caimán*—a crocodile. Yes, he was a hard egg, and he wanted people to know it. That was how he had risen to the command of a Funes garrison, no doubt. Funes liked 'em hard.

But that was nothing to me, now that I was again on my way, with my cargo unmolested. So I soon shoved Matanza into the back of my head and plodded along to the lower port, Zamuro. There, as at Salvajito, I found a corporal's guard. And there I met one of the brothers Carasquel.

CHAPTER II

"THE LIFE OF A DOG OR A MAN—"

THE corporal at Zamuro was more agreeable than the one at Salvajito and much more good natured than the *sargento* at Atures. Things were dull at the post, and he was glad to see a new face. Before long he invited me into the guard house and produced a jug of *caballo blanco*—white rum, you know, with a stiff kick—and, while my Indian boys loaded cargo aboard my *piragua*, we gave the bottle due attention. After a while I said:

"Your commandant, Matanza, is a fearless fellow, and very cool. I saw him take several lives today without showing the least excitement."

He stared, open mouthed. Then says he:

"*Ajo!* Did the men mutiny? And did he really fight them—or shoot them in the back as they went away?"

I snickered. That last question had confirmed my own impression of Matanza.

"No, nothing like that happened," I told him. "He killed a dog, full of pups—and of fleas, maybe. She was only about fifty feet away, walking along without noticing him, and he attacked her most valiantly, with a rifle. It was a brave deed."

His mouth hung open a second longer. Then he howled with laughter, thumping the table with a fist.

"*Cra!* That is more like it," he gurgled, when he got his breath. "That is the kind of desperado Matanza is."

Then he stopped short, looking at me warily. I grinned.

"I thought so," says I. "Don't worry; I won't repeat what you say. I have no love for Matanza. It would not hurt my feelings at all if he met with some accident during my absence—and if I found you, for instance, in charge of Atures on my return."

He smiled a little, and his eyes shone as if the idea pleased him. But then he turned solemn.

"The appointment of a commandant is always in the hands of El Coronel Funes," he reminded me. "And make no mistake, *amigo*, this Matanza is a hard one. The life of a dog, a flea, or a man is all the same to him, Even a trader must mind his words, Have care!"

"I'm not so big a fool as I look," says I. "But why do you say 'even a trader'? Is a trader sacred now?"

"Almost," he admitted. "You traders always bring the latest news from down the river, as well as the other things we need. Without you we should be in a bad way; this Amazonas country produces nothing but rubber and hammocks and such stuff; and, as you know, all mail and gossip travels on your boats. So, unless the Coronel has reason to suspect you of plotting against him, you traders are safer than ordinary people. But there is always a way for a commandant to explain a killing to the Coronel. And Matanza lives by killing."

With that he shut his mouth tight. I knocked a few mosquitoes off my face, poured another drink for myself, looked out through the door, saw that my boat was almost loaded, and lifted the cup.

"*Salud!*" I said, and drank it off. He took another swig from the jug. "I must be going. Is there anything I can do for you on my way down the river?"

"Nothing," he replied, "unless you will stop at Babilla Flaca and tell my people that we are well."

"Where is that?" I asked. "And who are your people?"

"It is about fifteen leagues down on the east shore," he explained. "My family is named Carasquel. I am Marcos Carasquel. Two of my brothers are here

with me. Tell my father and the others that we are well and strong, and that we get plenty to eat."

"*Bien.*" said I.

Then I looked at him a little more attentively. Those last words seemed rather odd. Why shouldn't he have enough to eat, and why was the fact that he fed well worth reporting at home? One might think that he had not been accustomed to much food before going to Zamuro. Then I dropped the thought and walked down to the boat.

After I was out on the river, though, I thought of him again, and of some other things. He was a decent looking fellow, that Marcos; much more honest eyed than most of the Funes gang. But that Babilla Flaca, if it was fifteen leagues downstream from Zamuro, was not in the Funes territory, so there would seem to be only one reason for the Carasquel brothers to join the up-river bandits—that is, that they had committed some crime which made their own section too hot for them. If they had been Amazonas men, they might have been forced into the gang against their will; that sort of thing often took place. But Funes made it his rule to let the down-river people alone—at least, as long as they kept out of his land and his affairs; so it was unlikely that the Carasquels had been compelled to become *soldados* of his. No, they must have gone to him because they chose to. And one reason why they might make that choice was because they would be reasonably sure of enough to eat.

That idea stayed with me until I reached Babilla Flaca. And then I became sure that it was right.

When I went ashore I found there five people. They were the father and the mother, both old and sickly; two boys, and the girl, Rita. One of the boys was well grown—about eighteen, perhaps—and the other about ten. Both of them were thin, looking undernourished and rather slow witted. The girl was thin, too, but seemed stronger, bodily and mentally, than her brothers. Her black eyes were quick, and so were her motions—and her tongue and temper, as I soon learned.

The old man, too feeble to move far, stood leaning against a doorpost as I approached. The boys stood near, staring dully. The girl and her mother were just inside the door, watching me with some anxiety; they knew nothing about me, and I looked pretty rough in my river clothes. I took them all in at one slow look, and then spoke to the man.

"*Buen' dia'*," said I. "I am Sixto Scott, from the Rio Vichada, bound to Bolívar. Your son, Marcos, asked me to tell you that he and his brothers are well and strong."

"Ah-h-h," said Carasquel, in a soft drawling tone of relief. "That is good, very good. Come in and sit. I can not offer you coffee; I have none, but—"

"I can't stop," I refused. "The breeze is too good this morning to be wasted, and I have nothing more to say. So, *adios*."

"But wait," he begged. "You can stay a few little minutes, surely; and I do not often hear from my boys. Did they send no other word?"

"Only that they had plenty to eat," I remembered.

Then I glanced at the different faces, and saw different expressions.

Father Carasquel looked a little sad, as if wishing his boys could have eaten well at home. The mother seemed pleased, and made a low murmuring sound. The girl looked wistful; then, seeing me watching her, bit her lip and tossed her head. The older boy scowled in a sour way, and the younger one looked hungry.

"That is very good," the old man repeated, slowly. "Very good." Then he gazed at the ground and sighed.

The older boy spoke up, in a heavy, growling tone.

"Did they send *us* something to eat?"

"No, of course not, I said. "They—"

"No, of course not!" he broke in, his voice ugly. "As long as their own bellies are full they care nothing about ours."

"Vicente! Shut your mouth!" the girl rebuked him, her eyes snapping.

"Shut your own!" he snarled, turning toward her. "Or I will shut it for you! Those pigs of brothers of ours, if they cared anything about us, would send us one good meal—one in a lifetime!—when this man was to stop here and—"

"Vicente!" barked the old man.

He stood up straight now, gripping hard on a stout stick he used for a cane; and his eyes were sharp as knives. And Vicente, after one look at him, shut up tight, looking sullen, but a little scared, too. But not the girl.

"Pigs?" she scolded. "You are the pig, always thinking of your own belly—and too lazy to go out and feed it! Marcos and Juan and Marcelo are men, willing to face danger, but you— Bah!"

I grinned. She was a handsome little thing and, now that her temper was alive, most interesting. Spirited, loyal and proud she was. Though ragged and underfed, she stood like a princess, full of scorn for the fellow who had sneered at his brothers and grumbled about lack of food before a stranger. The two of them glared at each other, and she would have said a good bit more if her father had not shut her off.

"Rita! That will do!" says he, as cold and dignified as if he were owner of a ten-thousand-acre *hacienda.*

Afterward, thinking it over, I felt that he must have been, at some time in his life, much higher in the social scale; he had the manner, when he was roused, of a man once accustomed to better things; and you can't always tell, along this rough old river, what a man has been before he came here. Anyway, he was still master of his family when he wished to be. Rita, the little spitfire, held her tongue after that. So did the others, until I spoke again.

"As I was saying," says I, looking at Vicente, "they can hardly send you food, because every bite they eat belongs to Funes and has to be accounted for. Marcos is corporal in charge at Zamuro, but he is under command of a *sargento* named Matanza, who is an unfeeling beast; and if he should send even an ounce of beef out of the Territory and any one should report it to Matanza—as somebody would—there might be serious trouble for him. Funes is not in the habit of giving away anything, and—"

There I stopped, not caring to add that Funes ordered men decapitated at the slightest provocation. That wouldn't sound well to the mother. But Father Carasquel nodded and looked very sober.

Nobody said anything for a minute or two. I took a look around and saw that everything looked frightfully poor. Those people barely existed; that was all. It was no wonder that Marcos and his brothers—those with enough energy to move—had gone to Funes. Even Vicente, the lazy one, looked ready to go to any place where food was plentiful. And it was easy to see that the rest of them, except, perhaps, the mother—a dull looking woman who never said a word—had more respect for the boys who had gone than for those who stayed. Or, rather, more than they had for Vicente. The youngster was too young to get into the up-river army, but he looked like a likely recruit in future. He resembled his sister a good deal, and he glowered at his big brother as if he would like to thrash him if he were strong enough.

"Well," said I, "I must be going. But I may stop on my way back."

"Do so," Carasquel invited. "And I thank you, señor, for delaying your voyage to deliver this message."

"*Es nada,*" says I. "It is nothing. *Adios.*"

And I walked back toward the *piragua.* At the top of the bank I paused a few seconds to look back. The boys had followed me, to stare at my Indians; but the father and the daughter stood side by side in the doorway, the man seeming to lean on the girl. Once more I thought that she was a handsome little thing. And then, somehow, I thought of Matanza.

"Maybe it's just as well for you, little lady," I said to myself, "that you're not where that crocodile can see you."

Then I dropped down the bank, boarded ship and blew out for Bolívar.

CHAPTER III

"NEVER COME BACK."

THOUGHTS are queer things. Sometimes they come to you for no good reason and seem to have no sense; and yet later on they may prove to be both reasonable and sensible—after something has happened.

For instance, there was no cause for me to think of Matanza when I was glancing back at Rita, nor to feel that danger would come to her, or to any one else, if he should see her. He was not likely to go outside Amazonas, unless ordered to do so by Funes; a commandant was expected to stick at his post, and if he left it without urgent reason he might find himself a head shorter when the Coronel learned of it. So there was not much chance that he would ever see that girl. Even if he should, there was very little reason to suppose that he would molest her; she lived down here, where Funes did not allow crimes by his men; and, besides, Matanza seemed too cold blooded and unfeeling to be susceptible to women. His only desire, apparently, was to be known as a hard, emotionless killer, deadly as a snake or a *caimán*.

But even a snake or a crocodile takes fancy to the females of his species; otherwise there would be no reproduction, as the *científicos* say. And girls are not always wise enough to stay where they are safe. And so that unreasonable thought of mine turned out to be a premonition, or something of the kind. For Matanza did meet Rita, and his cold blood warmed up—and better blood than his was spilled in consequence.

It all started while I was breezing along down toward Bolívar. Or, maybe, it started while I was there at Babilla Flaca, delivering my message. I've sometimes thought that I started it; that if I had neglected to keep my promise to Marcos and had come straight along without stopping at that hut, things might have turned out much differently. But I'm not sure. Anyway, this is what came about:

After I went, the boy Vicente and the girl Rita revived the quarrel their father had stopped. Vicente found fault with his brothers at Atures, as before, and Rita defended them, giving Vicente a hot dressing down in the meantime. To her, the young men up at Zamuro were heroes; they were in an army, and probably she pictured them as doing all sorts of romantic and desperate deeds. As a matter of fact, there was very little to do there at that time, and no fighting at all; nothing but garrison routine and watchfulness against possible government troops from down the river—who never came.

There was a killing now and then, of course, when some poor wretch suspected of hostility to Funes, or trying to escape from the Territory, was caught and beheaded; but that was no more dangerous than butchering a sheep. However, Rita, being proud and imaginative, and having only a hazy notion of what went on up there, thought her *soldado* brothers were in the thick of a battle most of the time, probably. And the lacing she gave that lazy lout of a stay-at-home Vicente must have been good. Anyway, it brought three results:

First, Vicente tried to carry out his threat to shut her mouth for her. Second, she knocked him almost senseless, grabbing her father's stick for the purpose and splitting it over his head. She was a capable young thing, that girl. Third, Vicente thought it over a few days and then decided to join the Funes army.

Probably the fact that they were eating well, while he was not, was what made him plunge. He was not the kind to be moved by much else. When he announced his decision, his father said nothing to hold him back. The old man was quite ill—he died a few months later—and took little interest in what the others did. Besides, Vicente was not of much use around the place; most of the work was done by Rita and the youngest boy, called Pepito; so his departure would be no loss to the family. In fact, the younger folks were glad to be rid of him, and when he left home they helped him on his way.

All three of them departed in a canoe.

There was no other means of reaching Zamuro; no *piraguas* happened to come past, and *piraguas* usually don't carry passengers free, anyway. So Vicente went in the family dugout, and Rita and Pepito went with him to fetch it back home. Both of them wished to see their brothers, too, and, maybe, to get one square meal while visiting them. They thought they were safe enough, with three brothers at Zamuro to receive them—one of whom was in command at the port—and a fourth going as recruit. And they were right. No harm came from that trip; at least, not then.

When they paddled in at the Zamuro port the sentry on watch happened to be one of their brothers. So they were made welcome at once. Marcos came down to the waterside on the run, and the third brother as well; and the rest of the guard, learning that this handsome girl was sister of their corporal, stood off and kept their mouths shut, though they kept using their eyes. Any good looking woman who came into the Amazonas territory took a long chance, unless she was related to somebody in authority. But Marcos and his brothers must have proved themselves unsafe to meddle with before then, for nobody even winked at Rita.

After the first greetings were over Marcos put another man on post, relieving his brother; and the six Carasquels went to the garrison house, where Vicente was quickly made a *soldado* in due form. Then Marcos said:

"I order you, my brothers in service, and you, Rita and Pepito, to accompany me at dinner. Those who bring in a recruit are entitled to a good meal."

"Does the recruit also eat?" demanded Vicente.

"Shut up! Speak when you are spoken to!" ordered Marcos. "You are in the service now, and I have already ordered you to eat with me. That is enough."

While this sank into Vicente's head the others laughed at him. Then Marcos summoned the cook and commanded him to make a good meal at once, though it was not yet the usual time.

Now, as it happened, the Sargento Matanza had decided to walk over to Zamuro that morning on a tour of inspection. He did this now and then, at no regular interval, with no announcement. Whenever he happened to feel like it—at midnight, or at daybreak, or at noon or any other time—he would make a trip to Zamuro or Salvajito, trying to catch the guards there napping. This time he found all as it should be at Zamuro, except that the corporal was entertaining newcomers at an irregular meal. He walked in on them just as they were beginning to eat.

"What is this?" he snapped, looking at the corporal.

"A family party, *sargento*," says Marcos calmly. "My brother Vicente, here, has come to join the army; so we are celebrating. Will you not have a bite with us?"

Matanza looked sneeringly at Vicente and spat on the floor; then glanced at the boy Pepito, who peered straight back at him without a blink.

"I would rather have that one," he jeered, moving his chin at the youngster. "He has twice the brains of this clod. And —"

There he stopped, his eyes fastening on Rita. She, too, was looking him straight in the face, like Pepito. And Matanza stood a minute without another word, staring at her. Then he said, in a rather odd tone:

"I will eat with you, *cabo*. I find myself hungry after the walk. Your chair, recruit!"

Vicente sat still, scowling at him; too dull to comprehend, or too greedy to leave the food in front of him. Matanza's lips twisted, and his hands shot to Vicente's neck. While the new man tried uselessly to break away, Matanza choked him blue faced, then flung him out of the chair to the floor.

"You need discipline, dog, and you have come to the right place to get it!" Matanza grinned. "Now get out, and wait at the rear. You can eat the scraps, if there are any, when we are through. Move!"

Vicente moved, without delay or protest. He had learned who was boss; and the boss now had a hand closed on the hilt of his machete and was watching him like a cat. He got through the doorway as fast as he could, and slunk behind the house.

Matanza spat after him, then swaggered into the vacant chair and looked again at Rita. Maybe he had thought she would be vastly impressed by his bold, strong manly ways. Instead, he found her glaring at him.

She hadn't much liking or respect for Vicente, but it was plain that she had much less for this bullying *sargento*. She held her tongue, knowing better than to use it against the commander of all her brothers; but those hot black eyes of hers spoke her opinion clearly enough. Probably, too, her temper made her all the prettier, just as it had when I saw her there at home. At any rate, Matanza said hardly anything after that, but kept looking at her while the meal went on. The only looks he got in return were full of dislike.

When all had finished, the *sargento* walked to the door and called:

"Recruit! Come here!"

Vicente came around from the rear, walking slowly and looking scared. Then said Matanza, in a mild way:

"Come in, and eat well. When I threatened to feed you scraps I was only teaching you your place. You are in the army now. When a superior speaks you must obey instantly. Remember that, and you will be well treated. Now sit."

Vicente grinned and lost no time in obeying. Marcos and his soldier brothers glanced at one another in astonishment; they had never heard Matanza speak so amiably. The *sargento* looked once more at Rita, who also showed surprise. Then he stepped out and walked away.

"Who is that beast, with the face of a turtle and the body of a lizard?" Rita asked then. "And why do you let him—"

"Ssssh!" Marcos warned her, jerking his head toward the open door. "He is the commandant here, and a hard one. Vicente, you fool, you are lucky to be alive, and twice lucky to have a whole jaw to eat with, and three times luckier to be allowed to eat. Hereafter, when the *sargento* speaks, you jump! And now, sister, you had better be going. And guard your tongue."

"Bah!" retorted Rita. "Any one of you could tie that wretch into a knot with one hand, and —"

"Be silent!" Marcos commanded, so sternly that she obeyed. "Have you no sense? Juan, take a look outside."

Juan stepped quietly to the door. Matanza was not in sight. But a couple of men a little way off were looking toward the house, as if they saw somebody near one of the side walls. Juan made a sign to his brothers, and all but Vicente—busy as a pig at his food—scowled at Rita. Marcos began talking of something else. Soon afterward he led Rita and Pepito back down to the port.

"Make haste home," he advised them. In a whisper he added, "And never come back here!"

Then he pushed them into their dugout and shoved it clear.

Rita, with a short "*Adios*," began paddling at once and kept her eyes on the currents. But Pepito, who had done no talking but watched and listened to everything, looked back as the canoe drew out. And, beside a bush near the edge, he saw Matanza.

The *sargento*, with "the face of a turtle and the body of a lizard," was not at all mild looking now. His narrow eyes were ugly, and his hard mouth more so, and his bony hands were hooked over his weapon belt. He made no move and said no word; but he looked, as Pepito told me later, "like the very devil himself"; so evil and cruel that the boy, who had been thinking he would like to be a soldier and have plenty to eat, decided he would rather starve all his life than be in the power of any such man.

For a few seconds Pepito stared at him. Then he put all the strength of his one meal at Zamuro into his paddle strokes, and went away from Funes ground and Funes men as fast as he could.

CHAPTER IV

"WE HAVE GIVEN FOUR MEN."

WHETHER Matanza had overheard what Rita said about him, or whether some other thing had put that ugly look on his face, is more than I can tell you. I had to get some of this story from other people—the boy Pepito, for one—because I was elsewhere when some of its events came about. At any rate, the boy never forgot that parting look at the *sargento*. And when they had gone a few miles down the river he told his sister all about it.

"I am going to obey Marcos and stay away from there," he added. "That man is worse than a lizard, as you called him; he is a poison snake."

"He is a puffed up lizard who thinks himself a dragon," the girl scoffed. "If a real man should walk toward him he would scuttle into a hole like any other lizard."

"A snake," Pepito insisted. "And I will never go near him again. Nor will I let you."

At that Rita burst out laughing and turned to look at him. To be told what she could or could not do by that small brother was something new. But after watching him a few seconds she grew sober.

"Thou art becoming a man, Pepito," she said. "Yes, thou art the only man left to our home, except our poor father. *Bien*. I promise that I will never go near thy snake-lizard. He sickens my stomach. Now let us paddle."

So they paddled on home. When they arrived they told their parents all they had seen and heard; and the father lay in his hammock saying nothing, but looking troubled. The mother, on the other hand, asked every detail about the meal Vicente had eaten and thought of nothing beyond that. She was that kind of woman.

Finally Father Carasquel said:

"*Bien*. We have given four men to Funes. We will give nothing more."

He looked at his boy and his girl, and when Rita asked just what he meant he gave no answer. Of course, it was clear that those two were needed at home to do the work which the sickly old folks could not do. But, even so, the remark was a little odd. I've sometimes wondered whether the old man, ill and near his death, caught a glimpse of things which had not yet come about.

So the two youngsters continued their usual drudgery of trying to grow food from poor soil—and maybe, with one less mouth to feed, got a little more to eat. And up at Zamuro the four brothers attended to the usual routine; they were kept there because, being down-river people, they were likely to recognize newcomers from below and be able to detect any spies trying to sneak in under assumed names. And over at Atures the commandant Matanza followed his usual course and continued to satisfy Funes that he was the man for the place. And as long as a commandant did that, he could do almost anything else he liked.

One of the things the *sargento* liked to do was to "make a soldier" of Vicente Carasquel. And he did a good job; at least, in making him obedient. Just what methods he used, I don't know; but they worked. The other Carasquel boys were faithful to their salt, and Marcos was particularly good at his work—else he would not have been given the command at Zamuro. But they had some brains in their heads and considerable decency in their hearts, and there were some things they wouldn't do.

Vicente was not troubled in that way. He was just a walking belly. So he made a perfect soldier—from the Funes and Matanza standpoint. He would do anything whatever, in or out of line of duty, that he was told by Matanza to do. If he had any brains he never used them to think with. If he had any heart he never let it bother him. He was utterly under the thumb of his commandant.

Now, just what was going on in Matanza's mind at the time is more than I know, of course; but I can guess. He

must have kept thinking of Rita, and wishing more and more that he could get her. If he had overheard what she called him there at Zamuro—as seems probable—he must have known that she despised him. But that fact wouldn't discourage him. On the contrary, it would gnaw at his vanity and make him determined to master her, to force her to realize that he was a bold bad man who must be feared. Quite likely he was angered at himself for having been so mild with Vicente in her sight, and that was one reason why he deviled Vicente into abject submission after she went; then he decided to break her spirit as well. Or perhaps he just desired her for herself. At any rate, he began making moves to bring her within his reach.

The quickest and most direct way, naturally, would have been to go down-river with a few armed men and capture her. But that couldn't be done without Funes hearing of it; and Funes, as I've said before, would resent that sort of thing *pronto*. Not that Funes cared anything about the down-river folks, but he didn't want to give the governor of another state, with federal soldiers at command, any excuse for attacking him. Funes, you see, desired to get himself recognized by President Gomez as the legitimate governor of Amazonas, and so, though he killed to left and right inside his own territory, he made great show of scrupulous regard for law and order outside it. Naturally it followed that his men had to be careful of what they did north of Amazonas. Of course, any one from the north who entered Amazonas took the same risks as the people already there. On their own soil the Funes gang could get away with murder, and did.

It was Matanza's task, then, to induce Rita to return to Funes ground. And, probably having heard that food was always scant at the Carasquel house, he made use of that knowledge in baiting his trap. Before long he sent a couple of *piraguas* down to the Apure section to load up with beef—the Funes outfit used to buy meat from the cattle rustlers down there—and allowed Vicente to go along with them. More than that, he ordered the corporal in charge of the expedition to stop at Vicente's home, on the way back, and wait while the fellow visited his family.

So the *piraguas* appeared at Babilla Flaca, with slabs of fresh beef spread all over the decks, drying in the sun; more meat than the hungry Carasquels had seen in all their lives. And Vicente swaggered ashore with machete hanging at his hip and rifle under his arm and sombrero cocked on one side of his head, acting as bold and tough as any of the hard eggs he had seen at Atures; a decidedly different looking *hombre* from the shiftless lout who had gone away from home. And with him went the corporal, friendly as a brother—yes, more so. The rest of the gang stayed aboard ship, as per orders, and behaved themselves.

Pepito, up at the top of the bank, watched the vessels come in and saw the beef. But Rita never laid eyes on that bait. She was in the house, with her mother, while her father stood guard in the doorway, clutching his stick—too weak to attack any one, but standing as straight and looking as fierce as he could. When he saw that only two men came, and that one of them was Vicente, he relaxed a bit; and as soon as his son said the corporal was his "very good friend" he made way and returned to his hammock. Then the family talked, while the corporal watched and listened and put in his own words at the right time.

"I have done well," Vicente boasted, after a while. "My friend, the corporal here, who knows men, says he has never seen a new soldier improve so fast."

"*Sí, sí*, it is true," the corporal grinned. "And the commandant, Matanza—a very shrewd one, that one—he says the same. All the men of the Carasquel family are good soldiers."

Father Carasquel looked pleased at that, but a little puzzled, too, as he gazed at Vicente. Probably he could not get used to the idea that this worthless loafer had so quickly earned the respect of the

hard *hombres* up yonder. Rita, too, looked a bit incredulous.

"And the *señorita* of the Carasquels," says the corporal smoothly, "also is remembered most vividly by the commandant. I know him well, and I know he is not easily impressed. But the beauty of the *señorita* cannot be forgotten, even by so stern a man."

"Humph! That lizard!" said Rita.

The corporal looked disconcerted, and Vicente scowled. The father watched them both. Then he asked:

"Why doesn't Marcos come to see us?"

"He is needed at Zamuro," the corporal explained quickly, before Vicente could give a wrong answer. "It is an important post, and he can not be spared at present. Perhaps later—"

He stopped there. The old man nodded and asked nothing further. Then the mother spoke, giving just the opening that was needed.

"Are you fed well, son?"

"*Sí, sí,* of a truth!" Vicente told her, patting her belly. "Not even the Coronel Funes himself feeds better than we do. Did not Rita and Pepito tell you about our meal at Zamuro? That was a poor one, because we were not expected and it was made in haste. But our usual meals are much better. We have —" There he named all sorts of good food. "And that reminds me: Marcos said you, Rita, should come back and have a better dinner with us—many of them, if you like. You can ride on the ship with me, and you will be perfectly safe. I will protect you on the way. And at Zamuro are our brothers. And the commandant, Sargento Matanza, likes you. So you shall have the very best."

He gabbled it off like a parrot. Matanza had drilled him in that speech, no doubt. But Rita and Pepito and their father all looked at him with suspicion. They knew something unknown to either Vicente or Matanza—that Marcos had told the girl never to come back. The mother, too, knew that; but, being slow minded, she only sat and stared. Then up spoke Pepito, who had said nothing up to this time.

"If the *sargento* likes us so well, give us some of that beef. Then we all can eat well without traveling."

Vicente stared at him, scowling. The corporal frowned, too. But he was quick in answering.

"We can not do that," he said. "That beef is for El Coronel, and every pound of it must be delivered."

"Shut your mouth, Pepito!" growled Vicente. "Or I'll shut it for you!"

"No, you won't," Rita contradicted him. "Try it, and I'll take the stick to you, as I have done before now!"

Vicente sat and glared, but looked a bit alarmed. The corporal laughed out loud. 'Twas enough to make any man snort—the sight of that boaster, armed with a gun and a machete and trying to be tough, but afraid of a girl's threat. Before he could say anything Rita went on:

"Pepito is right. If Marcos or that so important commandant wishes us to eat well, let them send us the food, or give it to us while it is here. We do not need to go to Zamuro to eat; we have done it here since we were born, and we can do it much longer. As for me, I do not want any food from Sargento Turtle-Face, and you can tell him so."

The corporal opened his mouth and shut it, saying nothing more. His guns were spiked, and he knew it. But Vicente was not so quick of understanding, and now he blundered, as might be expected. He left his bad temper slip.

"You're a fool!" he yelled, jumping up. "And don't you talk to me like that! I am a *soldado*, and I can shoot you dead! And I will, too, if I hear anything more from you! Now you get on that boat and—"

"Vicente!" shouted Father Carasquel.

Vicente swung around toward him, and went dumb. The old man had risen again from his hammock and stood boring a hole in him with his eyes. And Vicente flinched. He was big enough and strong enough to knock the sick old fellow down —perhaps to knock him dead—with one

punch of the fist. But he never thought of that, probably. Carasquel had made his boys respect and fear him; and they still did.

"You forget yourself," the father said, sternly. "What talk is this of shooting your own sister? And how dare you try to give commands in this house? Who do you think you are? The master of this house is I, and no man else; and if you think you or any other Funes *soldado*—or Funes himself—can take the mastery of it out of my hands you are mistaken. I have thrashed better men than you before now, and I can do it again."

He glanced at the corporal when he said that, and the corporal said nothing at all. It was a bold, brave speech for any man to make under the circumstances. There were two armed men in the hut, and more of them waiting on the ships, and all of them conscienceless; and, although the old fellow probably knew he could dominate Vicente, he couldn't be sure of the rest of them. But he had the pride and the courage to defy the whole Funes army, and probably the corporal respected him for it. Anyhow, he just stood silent. And the old man went on:

"You may be on your way back to Zamuro, Vicente, as soon as you like. Tell Marcos and the others that whenever they can come home to visit us we shall be glad to see them. Until then they will not see us—any of us. Neither Rita nor Pepito wishes to travel up the river again; and even if they did wish it, I would not allow them to do so. As for you—before you come here again, try to learn better manners. Now I give you *adios*."

He motioned toward the river. And Vicente, after staring at him a few seconds, slunk out like a kicked dog. The corporal, acting rather embarrassed, as if he had not expected Vicente to speak as he had, went through the usual formula of leavetaking and walked after him. He was a smooth one, that corporal. Since Vicente had blundered, he let him carry all the blame, giving no indication that the thing had been cooked up beforehand. Probably when he had Vicente out on the river he gave him a cursing that raised blisters on his hide, and there's little doubt that he reported the whole matter to Matanza afterward. But he executed a very strategic retreat.

Pepito followed the pair of them back to the shore, and took one last look at the meat strewn over the planks. Rita might have gone with him, but her father ordered her to remain in the house until the Funes men had gone, and she obeyed. Both the old man and his youngest son smelled a trap hidden behind that beef. Probably the girl did, too; but she would have gone to look at it, and at the men with it, unless told to stay behind; she wasn't timid. As it was, the *piraguas* hoisted sail and slid away up-stream with only a boy watching them go.

And, though that boy felt suddenly hungry after they had gone—hungry for meat, and for a gun, and for a life of adventure and association with grown men, instead of monotonous labor for two sick old folks and a girl—in spite of that, he was not sorry to stay behind. Ever since the name of Matanza had first been spoken, he had felt as if that cruel mouthed commandant were hidden somewhere close at hand; and now that the ships had departed it seemed that a coiled snake had left Babilla Flaca with them.

And, true enough, one had. But a snake which has gone from a place doesn't always stay gone. Sometimes it comes back—worse than when it went.

CHAPTER V

"IF WE WISH TO SHOOT A HERON—"

WHILE this was taking place at Babilla Flaca, I was creeping along the river at my usual gait, coming back from Bolívar, where I had done my usual business and had a bit of pleasure. And I was bringing back with me some things which—although I didn't know it then—were to be left at the Carasquel home. When I say I didn't know it, I mean that I didn't expect to leave so much. The only thing I meant to put ashore there

was a small bottle. And there was really no logical reason for me to do even that much.

The Carasquels were nothing to me, of course; just chance acquaintances, like many others I've made along this twisty old river. But there was something I liked about the old man, and while I was in town I thought of him and wondered what I could do for him. He and his family needed quite a number of things, but he was too proud to take much from a comparative stranger; and I'm not so soft as to be over generous, anyway. But there's one thing which is usually good up here and doesn't offend any one if it is given in the right way. That is quinine. So, while I was buying a few medicinal things which cannot be had from my Indians, I got a brown bottle of quinine pills for the old man. And when I reached this section again I steered over to Babilla Flaca to give them to him—and thereby steered myself into this matter of coincidence and Matanza.

I found everything quiet and dull at the place; even more so than usual, for the children were at work somewhere back on the little plantation, out of sight from the port, and only the parents were in the house. The father met me courteously, asked for the news from down-river, and listened with interest while I told it. Then says I:

"And how go matters above here? Have you heard of anything new since I passed down?"

"Nothing," he said, looking out in an absent way. "Since Vicente went back we have had no word."

"Vicente went back?" I echoed. "Back where?"

"Ah, you did not know," he remembered. "Vicente has joined his brothers with Funes. He has made us one visit since then."

"Oh," says I, somewhat surprised. "And how does he like the service?"

"Very well," he said, slowly. "He seems very well satisfied. And the corporal who came with him said the commandant, one Matanza, was much pleased with him."

I made no answer to that. I simply sat and stared. The thought of Matanza being pleased by any of his men, and particularly by such a clumsy recruit as Vicente must be, astonished me. The old man looked me steadily in the eye. Then he asked—

"Do you know that Matanza?"

"Slightly. And as well as I wish to."

"Ah," he said. "Tell me what you know about him."

I didn't, of course. That is, I didn't tell of the cold blooded shooting of the mother dog, and of what it showed the man to be. With four boys under the power of that brute, the old man would not have felt any easier for that sort of talk. Instead, I said:

"I know very little about him. But I know I don't like him; and when I don't like a man, the less I see of him the better for both of us."

He sat waiting for me to go on, but I kept still. After a minute or so he nodded as if I had said much. And perhaps I had. My face and eyes may have told him more than my tongue.

"Rita and Pepito did not like him, either," he remarked.

"What? Have they seen him?" I exclaimed. "Where?"

"At Zamuro."

And he told me how they had gone with Vicente and met Matanza. He left out a good deal, but gave me the principal facts. Then he mentioned that Vicente had brought Rita an invitation to return to Zamuro for another visit. That was all he said on that point. But right there I began to smell a large and dirty rat.

"She has not gone back there?" I questioned, looking around for her.

"No. And she will not," he assured me. "She and Pepito are at work outside. They will not go voyaging again."

"*Bueno!*" said I.

Then I smoked a *cigarrillo* and thought awhile. After that I looked around the hut once more.

"Have you a gun?" I asked.

"None that will shoot," he confessed. "There is an old *escopeta*, but it is good

for nothing except making a show of arms if necessary. The springs broke a long time ago, and I have not been able to get others."

"You ought to have a good one," I told him.

"I know it." He nodded. "But—" Then he shrugged and left the rest unsaid. The rest was, of course, "Where am I to get it?"

I answered that question for him. Down in the hold of my *piragua* was a small shotgun, reasonably good, which I had picked up for almost nothing in Bolívar. To be truthful, it had cost me nothing at all; I got it from another trader who had a bad run of luck in a little gambling game and lacked the money to square himself at the end. A lot of powder and shot went with it, and some of the shot was heavy. And the whole outfit was practically useless to me. I shoot nothing but big game, and then I use a rifle. All the small stuff I eat is killed by my Indians, with their arrows and darts and traps.

I had taken the gun and the ammunition partly because I thought I might amuse myself by trying to hit some birds with it on the way home, and more because I make any man who loses a gamble pay up; he would do the same to me, and if I didn't do it to him he would tell everybody I was soft, and that's not a good reputation to have down here. But now, thinking about Rita and Matanza and the Funes gang and poor old Carasquel, I felt that the gun might be needed sometime at Babilla Flaca. So I went to the ship and got it.

"Here," I said, when I came back, "is a gun which is of no use to me, and which I shall be glad to lend you until I come down again. And here are powder and shot and caps. There is no ramrod, but your boy can soon make one. Perhaps Pepito, or you yourself, can shoot a monkey now and then for meat—or kill a snake, if a bad one should crawl in here. One never knows."

And I laid the whole equipment on the battered boards that served as a table. With them I set down the bottle of quinine, saying nothing about it; in fact, I put it behind the powder can, where it would be found later on. The old man looked at the gun with shining eyes, giving no attention to the other stuff. And he made no pretense of refusing.

"You are most kind, *señor*," he thanked me. "And, if the gun is useless to you, I shall be glad to borrow it. It shall be well cared for."

"And put to good use, I hope," I added, with a grin. "By the way, this bag here is filled with large shot—as large as small bullets; big enough to kill anything that walks on two legs."

"I see." He nodded again. "We shall use that if we wish to shoot a heron."

"Exactly," says I. And we smiled at each other.

After that we talked a little more freely, though neither of us said all that was in our minds. Speaking slowly and saving breath seemed to be a habit of his; and I myself don't always say all I think. But what he told me was enough to make me see plainly the rat I had been smelling. And, although I make it my habit to let things alone which don't concern me—it's quite bad for one's health to do otherwise in this region— I decided to mix into this matter to the extent of dropping a few quiet words where they might cause my dear friend Matanza to stub his toe later on, if he should make any further moves.

"Well," said I, rising to go, "I shall soon see Marcos again, unless he has been transferred since I came down. And, if you would like to have me do so, I'll explain to him why Rita doesn't accept his invitation to come again to Zamuro."

"Perhaps that would be well," he consented, with a thin smile. "It is just possible that he may not altogether understand the matter."

"Right." I walked out, nodding an *adios* to the *señora*, who had sat all this time without once speaking. "And may good fortune be with all of you until we meet again."

"And with you, *señor*," he called. "And I thank you for—"

"It's nothing," I interrupted.

Then I went to the *piragua.*

Once, on my way to the water, I looked back, as on my other departure. The sun was swinging low and shining into the house. Outside everything was as peaceful as it had been when I arrived; the children still were out of sight, and nothing else moved. Inside, though, there was a slight change. The old man was not leaning idly in the doorway, but had moved to the table; and there he was carefully examining the gun that could kill anything on two legs.

CHAPTER VI

"THAT BLOODY BEAST AT ATURES"

WHEN I went ashore again—at Zamuro—I noticed a change in Marcos Carasquel.

His manner was not so easy and good humored as when I had last seen him. His greeting to me was curt and cool, his eyes a bit hard, his attitude rather stiff; and when he gave an order to a *soldado* his voice was more sharp and snappish than seemed necessary. It was easy to see that his temper had not improved during my absence. I suspected that he was not getting on well with Matanza.

As usual, I left the work of unloading my supplies to my crew, who were well used to it; and, with the regular certified list from the Bolívar customs house in one hand and a bottle of good Maracaibo in the other, I walked up to the guard house with the corporal. As we stepped along I glanced about, looking for Vicente, but did not see him. Two other men, standing together near the house, resembled Marcos enough to make me judge them to be his other brothers, Juan and Marcelo.

I noticed that they, too, had rather grim expressions, and that they stood well away from other Funes men. It looked as if the Carasquel boys were not well liked by the rest of the guard at the moment. In face, one sour faced mestizo slid a wicked look at the corporal when we passed him. Marcos either failed to observe it or ignored the fellow. We went on inside.

I laid the list of my stuff before him, but he shoved it back without examination.

"I do not want to look at that," he refused. "Show it to the commandant."

"*Bien,*" said I. "Then let us look at this."

And I worked the cork out of the bottle.

"*Con mucho gusto,*" he agreed, smiling a little.

So we took generous samples, lit *cigarrillos* and sat down.

"How goes everything?" I asked then.

"Well," he said.

But his eyes hardened again, and he looked out of the doorway—toward Atures.

Glancing that way, I saw that one of the pair who resembled him was standing on guard, watching outward.

"Your brother?" I asked.

"Yes. Juan."

"Where is Vicente?"

His lips tightened a little.

"At Atures," he explained. "What is the news from below?"

I gave him the river gossip, which amounted to little. Then I told him that I had called twice at his home, finding all well. And, in a casual way, I added:

"Rita did not think best to accept your invitation to return here. Neither did your father."

He sat staring, the smoke of his cigaret rising straight from the tip until he took a sudden puff.

"What?" he demanded. "My invitation? What invitation?"

"The one you sent by Vicente," says I, "to come back and eat well. Have you forgotten?"

For a minute he sat very still, his eyes seeming to shrink to pin-points. Then he said, in the tone that makes one think of the edge of a knife:

"*Sí.* I have completely forgotten it. Tell me about it."

So I told him what I knew. And his

face grew darker and darker. When I finished he sprang up, slammed his cigaret to the floor and paced around the table, swearing like a pirate. He cursed Vicente, he damned Matanza, and he added to Matanza's name every hard word in the Spanish language. By the time he stopped for breath it was quite clear that during my absence he had grown to hate Matanza most bitterly, and that my news of this attempt to trick his sister was all that was needed to put him into a killing rage.

Then he wheeled toward the door, where Juan had turned about to look at us and listen. Marcelo, too, was standing there now. And both of those boys looked savage as blood hungry *tigres*.

"Juan!" panted Marcos. "You have heard? You heard what the Señor Scott said?"

"*Sí*. I heard," Juan replied, in a grating tone. "And I think it is time for a bad accident to happen to that bloody beast at Atures. He is the one behind this thing, and—"

"That is the truth!" Marcelo broke in. "Vicente, the slimy worm that he is, never had a brain in his head and never will have. He is a crawling sucker of offal, nothing else, and it was the filthy beast who owns him who put the words into his mouth. But let me fasten my hands on the foul idiot, and I will gut him! And that putrid Matanza—*por Dios*, we have already stood more than enough from him, and now we will—"

"*Silencio!*" barked Marcos, suddenly remembering his position and recovering some sense. "What talk is this? You fool, stop yelling!"

All three glared at one another, but there was no more loud talk. Juan turned quickly and looked around outside. Marcelo set his teeth and was dumb. Marcos looked suddenly at me, with eyes narrow. I grinned.

"I neglected to mention," said I, "that I left with your father a gun, with plenty of ammunition, for use in case any snake should come from—well, from Atures."

"*Bueno!*" he exclaimed, and he gripped my hand hard.

His brothers gave me a quick look and a short nod; then turned to watch outside again. They all felt now that I would not carry tales to Matanza.

"And I think I also forgot to say that there is no chance of Rita ever coming back here," I added. "She despises Matanza. And your father would not let her come even if she wished to. So no harm is done. Let that poor fool over at Atures choke himself with his own conceit. He can do no harm. You know as well as I that he can not leave his post—"

"Unless he deserts," muttered Marcos. "More than one commander has done that."

"That was why I left the gun," I said. "If he does anything of that kind he will meet a warm welcome."

He made a short sound, which might mean nothing at all or a good deal, and scowled at the table. Quite likely he was thinking that his father would not have to do any shooting; that he himself would do it, if Matanza should ever start down the river—and, maybe, even if he did not. But he kept his thoughts inside his head. And after that very little was said.

At length I stood up, pocketed my cargo list and slid the bottle again toward Marcos. He took a long gulp. I followed his example—but cut the drink short.

As my head tilted back and my eyes lifted, a vague shadow seemed to move on the under side of the palm thatch. I lowered the bottle quickly and glanced around. The room had a small rear door, and the door stood partly open, and beyond it was sunlight. I stared at it a few seconds, then stepped to it and looked out. Nobody was there. The place behind was a cook shed, open at the sides, with the slanting sun shining in. Looking to right and left, I saw nobody at either side. So I turned back.

Marcos was close behind me, and he, too, glanced out. Then he looked oddly at me. I shrugged.

"I thought something moved," I said.

"Nobody but the cook comes there," he said. "And he is never there except when he is needed."

With that he turned back impatiently into the room. I followed, and decided to keep on going. There was little use in staying longer, as everything necessary had been said and my few supplies must be out of the ship by then. So I corked the bottle and moved to the main door.

"*Hasta luego*," I said. "I shall be back in a few months. Until then, good luck to you—and bad luck to your enemies!"

Marcos grunted, and the other two made no sound. They had become very quiet, and all of them were watchful. No other man was standing near, but they all seemed suspicious.

Marcos, with a hand near his revolver, walked only a few steps with me toward the bull cart, which now was nearly ready for me. Then he wheeled about, scowled toward the house and muttered an order. His brothers, with rifles ready, parted and strode around opposite corners. After a couple of minutes they appeared again at the door, having met at the rear and come through.

"Nothing," said Juan.

I walked to the cart, leaving the three of them standing there and looking as ominous as thunder clouds.

In a few more minutes the bullocks began hauling the load toward Atures, and I and my men walked after it. As we went, I felt that Marcos might have made two mistakes—first, in cursing Matanza so recklessly and, second, in losing a few minutes before reassuring himself that no listener had been lurking close. True, I had seen nobody at the rear, and the brothers on guard had protected the front. But the memory of that half seen shadow bothered me. I wished I could know just what had made it.

Before long I found out.

CHAPTER VII

"GET UP, PRISONER!"

CROSSING the long Atures portage is slow work, as you know. Bullocks never travel fast, even when they have little to haul. And the job of unloading, ferrying and reloading into a new cart at the Rio Catañapo, before reaching Atures, uses up more time. So it was quite late in the day when we walked into the *pueblo* of the garrison and I turned to the house of Matanza.

I hated the necessity of talking again to that skinny sneak. But it was unavoidable; and I had resolved to go through with it sensibly. No matter how insolent and irritating he might be, I would hold my temper, be cool and civil, conclude the matter as soon as possible, and forget him as quickly thereafter as I could. Even if he should shoot a dozen dogs—or a dozen men—in my sight, that was not my concern; I was a trader, and would mind my own business—mind it better than I had been doing of late. The Carasquels and their affairs were all behind me and were nothing to me anyway. From now on I would attend strictly to the welfare of Sixto Scott. It was in that frame of mind that I went to speak to the commandant—ready to meet his contemptible conceit without resentment.

The fellow astonished me. I found him, not loafing at the door, but sitting in a businesslike way at the commandant's desk; and when I stood before him he gave me no sneering gaze nor nasty words. Instead, he smiled thinly and nodded.

"You have made a good trip, Scott, I see," he said, glancing at an open record book at his elbow. "It is less than six weeks since you went down. What do you bring back?"

"Personal supplies, as usual," I told him quietly. "Here is the customs house list."

I laid it on the desk and eyed him while he went through it. This was a different reception than I had expected. I knew he disliked me, and he knew I had no love for him; so there was much more reason for him to be disagreeable now than when we had first met. Yet he was treating me in a friendly fashion and examining my list as a commandant should, instead of dismissing me contemptuously as before. It seemed that he had learned something about the duties of his position

in my absence, or else that he must have been in an ugly mood at our last meeting. Perhaps both were true.

He studied the list with care; more care than seemed really necessary, unless he was a slow reader. Once I thought his mind was not on the words at all, for he smiled again, and there certainly was nothing amusing on that dull list—unless it might be the case of rum I was taking home. Yet he saw what was there, for he made a note or two in the book before he slid the list back to me. Then he leaned back and grinned. His teeth were long and irregular, as well as considerably decayed, and looked unpleasant behind his pale lips. But one could hardly expect a really pleasant look on a face like his.

"Nothing contraband there," he said. "And you picked up nothing else on your way up from Bolívar?"

"Nothing but mosquito bites," I denied.

"You are welcome to those," he chuckled. "And what news have you?"

I gave it to him—the same unimportant hearsay I had related to Marcos Carasquel. Naturally, I said nothing about my stop at Babilla Flaca or my talk with the Carasquel boys at Zamuro. He listened in a half attentive way, with his eyes on the opposite wall; and once or twice he smiled as if seeing something that pleased him, although only the mud partition was in sight. When I ended my talk he continued to stare at nothing that I could see. Suddenly he came to himself and scowled at the desk, collecting his thoughts.

"*Bien*," he said. "All is peaceful, it seems. As for your supplies, I must have them all inspected and make sure that they conform with your paper. There is an order—" he turned a thumb toward a long envelope at his right—"that everything passing through must be examined and found correct."

That was easily understood. Old Man Funes, you know, was always in fear that somebody would start a revolt or assassinate him—as many men wished to do. So he wished no guns or ammunition smuggled through; and it was one of the Atures commandant's responsibilities to see that none were. Whenever Funes felt more apprehensive than usual, everything bound up-stream was inspected rigidly.

"And," says Matanza, "it is now too late in the day for you to depart from Salvajito, even if I should pass you at once. So you will stay here tonight; I shall inspect your cargo when the air is cooler; and at sunrise your cart will be loaded and ready to go."

I could not quarrel with that plan, either, although I had intended to sleep that night at Salvajito and shove off in the cool of the morning. It all was regular enough; and a few hours made little difference to me. So I folded up my paper, gave him a formal assent and good night, and walked out, marveling at the improvement in his manner.

The sentry at the door, who had taken my rifle from me when I went in, gave it back as I passed out, and faced forward again as if I did not exist. He was a new man there—at least, new to me—and stiff as a post. I strolled back to the cart, where my Guahibos waited, and told my head man to take out our hammocks. Then we all went to the house where we usually stayed when compelled to stay at Atures, and hung our beds in an open shed beside it. As usual, the owner, old Tolomeo Otero, invited me to sleep inside his thick walls; but, as usual, I refused. I like the open air, and I always stick by my men. Indians, you know, are not welcome in the houses of these Orinoco people.

For the time I had forgotten Vicente Carasquel, who, according to Marcos, was stationed now at Atures. After a while, though, I remembered him and looked around. He was nowhere in sight. Other men, soldiers off duty, loitered not far away, but none spoke; and I had not enough interest in Vicente to ask where he was. As I was looking at the others, though, I noticed one face that seemed familiar; that of a mestizo who stood half hidden behind a taller man and who, when he saw me gazing at him, moved still farther out of sight. While I was wondering where I had seen him be-

fore and whether he was trying to avoid my eye or had changed his position without thinking—as a man often does—one of my Guahibos spoke to me, calling my attention to some trivial thing or other. When I looked again at the mestizo he was walking away, and all I saw was his back. So I forgot him—for a while.

Matanza himself soon came out, but did not approach my sleeping place. He stood a few minutes at his door, looking toward me; and, though he was some distance away and the light was failing, it seemed to me that I could detect a mocking grin on his mouth and a devil in his eyes. But then he called a command, and a couple of peons began unloading my cart, while he turned and stepped back into his house. The peons carried the first packages in after him and came out for others. He himself remained inside. And I did the only thing I could do—loafed and hoped nothing of importance to me would be seized.

The Atures commandant, you know, always had the opportunity and the power to take anything he liked from the overland shipments, as long as he touched nothing destined to Funes. Thus far, though, none of the commandants at Atures had ever plundered my stuff to any extent. Usually a little rum or quinine, or something of that kind, was all they took; and almost any federal governor, in the same sort of place, would have grafted more than that. There was no particular reason to suppose that Matanza would do worse, especially when he was in such an unusually good humor. And even if he did, there was nothing that could be done about it. So, as night shut down, I made ready for a good rest and an early start in the morning.

My Guahibos, observing that I was unconcerned, went to sleep as calmly as if at home in their own huts. I lay for a time dozing, hearing a few town sounds now and then—a voice or two, a rough laugh, a bark of a dog—but nothing worth listening to. I wondered, in a vague way, what had made Matanza so good tempered today, and what he had been grinning at when he stared at the wall; but I didn't care. I thought again of the Carasquel boys, and half regretted telling them the news which might start a bloody row later on; but it was too late to waste regrets on that, and it might eventually prove a good move; a man never can see far ahead or be sure whether he's right or wrong.

I thought a little too, about that mestizo who had avoided my eye, and wondered again, sleepily, who he was. If I had stayed awake longer and meditated more on that point I might have suddenly seen the answer to several questions. But just about then I lost track of everything and fell sound asleep.

The next thing I knew was that something hard had punched me. I sat up in one jump—but moved no farther. A yard away was the thing that had jolted me: a rifle muzzle, now pointing at my stomach. Behind it was a hard faced and hard eyed corporal, and behind him were several *soldados*, all with guns ready. My own gun was gone from the hammock.

"Get up, prisoner!" snarled the fellow who had waked me. "Get up and walk!"

CHAPTER VIII

"SHOW IT TO ME, HERE AND NOW!"

I LOOKED around. Gray dawn, damp and chilly, was on the place. My Guahibos, standing, were huddled together, powerless before the guns. We were caught cold.

"What is this?" I demanded.

"You will soon learn," the corporal growled. "Move!"

"To where?"

"To the *carcel*."

I scowled. I'd never yet been in a jail—least of all a Funes jail—and the idea angered me. I stood up, though, feeling for my poniard as I rose. That weapon was gone, too. But at the movement of my hand the corporal's face tightened.

"Have care!" he warned. "Or I will blow your guts out."

"Have care yourself, timid one," I sneered. "Or I may sneeze and scare you to death."

Two of the men snickered at that. The situation was a bit ridiculous—half a dozen gunmen covering a disarmed trader and a few unarmed Indians, and the corporal acting as if he thought me dangerous. But that corporal saw nothing funny in it; my taunt and those snickers maddened him so that he came near shooting me than and there. He hissed through his teeth:

"*Sangre de Cristo!* Start your feet, or stop walking forever!"

"Stop spitting on your chin," says I. "You drool like an idiot. And tell me by whose order this is done. It's not by yours. You're nobody."

The look he gave me was poisonous. But he answered my demand.

"The commandant himself orders it!" he snarled.

"Oh, he does, does he? I think you are a liar," I told him, "and I will go to headquarters and ask him. Now get out of the way, before I step on you."

And I started forward. He gave way promptly, still keeping the gun on me. But he said:

"He is at the *carcel*, you big fool. He waits there for you."

I eyed him closely, looked across at the headquarters, saw nobody there but a sentry and glanced at the men behind the corporal. One of them nodded and moved his head toward the jail, which was not in sight from where I stood. Evidently the corporal was telling the truth.

"*Pues*," said I, "in that case I will go there *pronto*. I want to know what he means by this. And while I am gone let nobody molest these boys of mine."

"Bah!" he sneered. "Who cares what happens to *Indios*?"

"I do, and you are likely to, if you're not careful toward them," I promised.

Then I told the Guahibos to wait there for me. They looked doleful and quite doubtful of seeing me again—the chances did not seem very good—but they said nothing. I started for the jail.

The corporal and all his men walked behind me and, maybe, made a great show of readiness as we marched along, though hardly any one was out to watch them at that hour. The fellow took his little job very seriously. But I paid no more attention to him. I was wondering what it was all about.

I knew, of course, that I had done a thing or two that might make Matanza my enemy, such as leaving the gun at Babilla Flaca and stirring up the Carasquels against him at Zamuro. But it seemed hardly likely that he had learned so soon of those things; and I had a right to do them, anyway, whether he liked them or not; I was no slave or soldier of his. And I stood well with the Funes gang in general, as I never mixed into any anti-Funes plot; so there could be no order out against me from Funes himself—unless somebody had lied about me. Funes was more than half mad, and always ready to believe that anybody and everybody was conspiring against him; and many a man was beheaded up there because of some informer's lies.

Still, I was a Colombian, living not only outside Amazonas but outside Venezuela; and, as I've said before, Funes was always careful not to overstep his bounds. Furthermore, I was a trader and Marcos had said a trader was "almost sacred". And the goods I was bringing through were all as per invoice, with no contraband, so there could be nothing against me on that score.

This all went through my head as I walked, and the only reason I could see for my sudden capture and march to jail was sneaky spite of Matanza, who might be feeling mean that morning. And if he thought I would submit tamely to imprisonment for any such cause he had something to learn.

The *carcel* was down behind the rest of the village, so I had to take quite a number of steps before reaching it; and at every step I warmed up more, physically and mentally. When it came into sight I saw several men standing there as if on guard—although the thick-walled pen

needed no guarding—and, as I drew near, I found Matanza himself leaning against a corner and smoking a *cigarrillo*. On his lank face was the same grin, in his eyes the same devil's light, that had been there when he looked at me across the plaza at nightfall.

"*Buen' dia'*, Señor Smuggler!" he called. "Welcome to our prison!"

I stared at him.

"Smuggler?" I repeated. "Smuggler of what?"

He laughed mockingly.

"Of cartridges. You idiot, did you think you could get them past me?"

He took another puff of smoke and blew it out in that insulting way that's the same as spitting on a man. I had been peevish before. Now I got mad.

"What in hell do you mean, you misborn son of a diseased *caimán*?" I exploded. "Have you lost the few traces of brains you were born with? Those cartridges are for my own gun—for use in hunting. Do you expect a man to live on the Vichada without a supply of bullets?"

His face contracted when I called him that contemptuous name, and his right hand moved toward his revolver. But as I went on he grinned again, nastily.

"A poor excuse, Scott," he jeered. "I do not mean the few boxes on your list. I mean the case—the whole large case—of cartridges listed as canned food; enough cartridges to last one man for five years, hunting every day. You braying burro, you thought you could carry them through, did you? You would like to see our Coronel killed, would you? Ass! You have something to learn about the brains of Sergeant Matanza! And until you are ready to tell who is buying those bullets from you, you will rot inside these walls—without food or drink."

My heat went out of me in no time. I saw his game, or thought I did. There was a case of canned food in my lot—cans of sweets and other tidbits, very welcome to the palate of any white man at times as a change from the crude stuff of the wilderness—and, like all tinned goods, it was heavy. Matanza was the only one, except myself, who knew what was in that case. He was the only one who had examined it, the only one who had read my list. And this accusation of his was spoken for the ears of the *soldados*, who would believe every word of it and, if I should be shot or starved to death, would afterward tell all other Funes men . . . .

"*Sí*. Scott tried to smuggle through cartridges for use against El Coronel, but Matanza was too sharp for him."

Then Funes, hearing this tale through his various spy routes, would be likely to believe the report of his commandant and commend him—maybe promote him—for detecting my treachery. So that would be the end of it, and of me too.

I took a look around, and saw that there was no chance for me to escape. In fact, I knew it before I looked. There were a dozen men, behind and before me, with repeating rifles. And even if I were one of those story book supermen who can slap a dozen gunmen to death with one hand, I should still have the rest of the Atures garrison to demolish, and the one at Salvajito after it, before I could go on up-river.

No, there wasn't a chance. If it had been merely a matter of fists, or even of knives, I might have been fool enough to try it; I could have used my weight in that sort of brawl. But to go against .44 bullets—no, thank you! Not without a gun in my own hand, anyway. I know what a man looks like after he has met one of those slugs; I've looked at more than one corpse, after firing the ball that killed him. And there were at least a hundred of those heavy hunks of lead around me.

But I wasn't ready to go into the coop yet. I had one shot left on my tongue, and I let it go.

"You're loco," I snapped at him. "There's no case of cartridges in my lot. The only cases I have are one of rum and one of canned food, and you know it! And I defy you to produce any such box as you're talking about. Show it to me, here and now!"

He grinned again, as if I had played into his hands. And I soon found that I had.

"*Bien.*" he said. "Tobal, put before this innocent *señor* the case he asks for."

A man came from behind the others, carrying a box—the same box in which my tinned food had been packed. In it were the same cans. But every can now was open at the top. And in every can was packed .44 bullets!

For a few seconds I gaped like an idiot. The men standing around all moved closer, taking a quick look. Then they grinned, snickered, chuckled and laughed loud. If there had been any doubt in their minds about my attempt to smuggle, there was none now. The sight of the bullets in those opened tins was convincing.

It almost convinced me, too, until my brain began to work. I had ordered those supplies from a Bolïvar merchant, and of course I had not looked at them; a man doesn't open a can until he intends to use the contents. I had not even opened the box in which they were packed. Now it looked for a moment as if something had gone wrong; as if cartridges meant for some revolutionist had been smuggled into Venezuela in food cans, and some ignorant clerk, filling my order, had put those cans into my case. But then I saw through the mystery. The cartridges had been planted there by Matanza.

With my supplies in his house all night, it had been easy for him to open the tins, dump all the contents into gourds for his own use, and pack a lot of garrison cartridges into the emptied containers. The fellow was clever. He had made the evidence against me complete, so far as his own witnesses were concerned; and they were the only ones whose word would count. In fact, there were no other witnesses anywhere.

I looked at him, and he blew more smoke at me, in that same spitting way. I looked at his men, and saw only the merciless grins a condemned smuggler might expect to find. And then, just as I was getting ready to jump at Matanza and try to break his skinny neck before somebody could shoot me—I'd rather be shot quickly than starve slowly in a filthy prison—I saw something about one of those men that checked me a moment.

He was a mestizo; the same mestizo who had dodged my eye at sundown. More than that, he was the mestizo whom I had noticed at Zamuro—the one who had looked so wickedly at Marcos Carasquel when we walked to the guard house. I recognized him now. And in his snaky eyes was the same look he had given Marcos.

Looking at him, I saw again the vague shadow that had moved in the room of Marcos's house; and somehow I felt that I knew the reason for Matanza's grins last night, and that something hideous was hanging over me now. That mestizo was a spy, and he had heard all that was said inside the Zamuro house, and . . . .

Then something hit me. Matanza was watching me, of course, and probably my face looked dangerous; and, having no intention of getting hurt, he must have given some signal to the corporal behind me. At any rate, about a tenth of a second before I reached the point of jumping at somebody and doing some damage, my head blew up and I fell a hundred miles into nowhere.

CHAPTER IX

"WILL THEY KILL US?"

I WOKE up in jail, with a vile headache and a worse temper. As soon as I looked around and realized where I was, I swore furiously. But then, looking again, I forgot my head and my heat and everything else while I stared at my fellow prisoners. I was not alone in the place. There were others—four others.

The jail was a one room pen, divided into two cells by strong bars of heavy wood midway. I was in one of those cells—the one farthest from the door. On the other side of the bars, scowling at me, were the Carasquel brothers.

All four of them were there, from Marcos to Vicente. And three of them glared

at me as if aching to kill me. If the cell gate between us had not been chained and padlocked, they might have attempted it. The fourth, Vicente, was scowling too, but in a vacant way; he was bruised and bloody and seemed sick with fear.

"The devil!" I exclaimed. "What does this mean?"

"You know well enough, you slimy spy!" snarled Marcelo, the one who had talked so violently yesterday. "You put us here! And, *por Dios*, if I can once get my hands on your lying throat—"

"Stop right there!" I got up off the floor and stepped straight to him. "What in hell do you mean by that?"

He shot his arms between the bars and clamped his hands on my throat, as he had threatened to do; and his grip was wicked. But I grabbed his wrists and forced them away, twisting until the bones crackled. He groaned and squirmed in spite of himself. Then I threw his hands back hard against the bars. They dropped as if numb. Probably they were.

"Easier said than done, my cockerel," I told him. "Now tell me what you mean by calling me spy, or I'll tear out a bar or two and come through at you."

"You—you—" he gulped, almost crying with helpless rage. For the moment he could say nothing more.

Then up spoke Marcos, hard and cold—

"You told Matanza what we said yesterday—"

"You're a liar!" I contradicted. "Why, you damned idiot, would I be here now if I were a spy? Here in this pen, knocked out and accused of smuggling cartridges? Not much! I'd be Matanza's best *amigo*, and—"

"More than one tool of Matanza has found himself here," Marcos interrupted.

His hard eyes slid toward Vicente. And Vicente cringed as if expecting a kick. His movement, his expression, and his battered condition made it quite plain that his own brothers—or Marcos, at any rate—had given him the beating from which he now was suffering.

"That may be," I said, growing a bit cooler. "But it does not apply to me. If anyone has spied and reported on you, it must be a certain mestizo whom I saw at Zamuro yesterday and here last night, and again this morning. He has a scar on his nose."

They shot quick looks at one another.

"Mendez!" said Juan. "Chepe Mendez! He was missing at supper time. And the snake hates us all. You remember, Marcos, you flogged him for insolence, and since then he has made trouble."

"He wishes to become corporal in my place," Marcos said grimly. "And now he probably will."

They all looked soberly toward the shut door, as if something bad waited outside. Watching their faces, I felt a bit chilly. We all were quiet for a minute. Then I said:

"We are a pack of fools, to stand here calling names and trying to fight through the bars. If you men still wish to think I have played informer, you are welcome to do so. But what I have really done is this . . ."

I told them everything that had come within my knowledge since leaving them. By the time I finished, they believed me. Their faces showed it.

"And that's all I know," I ended. "Now let's hear your side of it."

It was Marcos who answered. First he apologized for having doubted me. But, he said, the evidence had been against me. I was the only man known to have come overland who had heard what was said inside his guard house. The mestizo Mendez had been missed, but he had a habit of going away alone to sulk and, besides, was not believed to have enough brains or daring to play spy. Furthermore, Matanza himself had given them reason to think I was the informer.

He had caught them by surprise—the three Zamuro boys, I mean—in the middle of the night, when nobody but a lone sentry was awake. That sentry had, of course, recognized the *sargento* and let him pass. So Marcos and Juan and Marcelo had known nothing until they

were roused to find *soldados* from Atures standing beside their hammocks, ready to shoot, and Matanza leering at them from a safe distance. They were caught cold, without a chance to reach a gun—not even Marcos, who always slept with a revolver belted on. That revolver was gone when he reached for it, and two rifle muzzles were against his ribs. As for Juan and Marcelo, they were ordinary privates, without revolvers; and their rifles and machetes were out of reach.

Marcos had made matters worse—if possible—by showing his hate for Matanza. After one look around, he had blazed out at the *sargento*, calling him every name that came to his tongue, and daring him to come over and face him, man to man, with bare hands or cold steel. The sudden sight of that cruel face, he told me, had knocked all sense out of his head; he had hated his commandant for some time, and had gone to sleep thinking of what he would like to do to him, and this sort of awakening had caught him in the same mood. It was not until he swore out his temper that he thought of demanding the reason for the raid.

"Ho! Hear the innocent!" sneered Matanza. "*Cra*, he wants to know what this means! After proving to all the world that the charges are true, he asks the reason for his arrest! Then hear, imbecile. You are charged with insubordination and conspiracy to overthrow the Coronel—beginning here by assassinating me, the commandant of Atures, and going from here up the river to kill the great commander of all of us! You talked of it today, here in this house, and thought, in your conceit, that I should not hear. Thick headed fool, learn now that Sergeant Matanza has long ears! Your words traveled straight to me at Atures. And now you, traitor, and your brother traitors will travel the same road. *Vaya!*"

Most of that speech was for the ears of the aroused privates of the outpost; and it convinced them at once. There had been some trouble there, as I said before—just what, I never learned—and most of the men were ready to believe anything bad of the Carasquels, and were glad to see them caught. Maybe Marcos had favored his brothers, and the rest had grown jealous. Anyway, nobody stood by them now.

Marcos swore again at Matanza, and Juan and Marcelo cursed with him, but that only made Matanza grin and condemned them further before the rest. Then, with guns against their backs, the three were marched out. And, angry as they were, they had sense enough to go, instead of committing suicide by trying to kill Matanza. He was out of their reach, and one word from him would have sent bullets through their hearts. So they were marched overland and jailed, while I was peacefully asleep.

After confining them and giving them a sarcastic farewell that was not likely to make them rest well, Matanza had left them. They had heard no more until morning, when vague voices sounded outside the thick walls, and then I was dragged in, senseless.

"Here is a most loyal friend of yours," Matanza mocked them, while several men covered them with guns, "who never betrays simple soldiers who talk too much. Ah, no, he never does. But lest you should make a mistake and smother him with kisses, I shall put him into that other cell."

And he had me thrown into the farther end of the pen and the gate locked. Then, as he backed away from the open door, he added:

"I do not wish you to be lonely, so I give you one of your own blood for company. Have a sweet reunion, brothers all! I go now to eat breakfast. When I have finished I shall return and reward you for your faithful service!"

With that he ran a thumb along the edge of his machete, grinning like a devil. Then a couple of men threw Vicente head first into the place and slammed the door.

Marcos stopped talking at that point, turning his eyes on Vicente; and they stabbed like knives. Vicente cringed

again, and slunk farther away from all of them. Marcelo growled something and swung toward him. But Juan gripped his shoulder and, though he jerked angrily away, he did nothing more.

"Well," said I, "that accounts for all of us—except you, Vicente. What did you do that brought you here with us jail birds?"

He stared dully at me, licked his bloody lips, and shuddered.

"I don't know, I don't know," he muttered. "I have done nothing—I don't know, I don't know!" Then, shaking all over, "*O Cristo!* Will they kill us?"

Nobody answered. His brothers turned away from him in disgust. He cowered still farther back into a corner, twisting his fingers and whimpering. And then for a while the place was quiet. There was nothing more to be said. We all stood there waiting, looking often at the door.

CHAPTER X

"TRAITORS, COME OUT!"

IN the wall at my end of the prison was a window; a tiny thing, less than a foot square, and barred. After a while I stepped to it and peered out. Nothing was in sight, except a large *sarrapia* tree near by and the woods farther away.

I tried the bars, though it was useless to think of escape through that hole. The opening was no wider than my head; the wall was two feet thick, and solid as stone; and the bars, I quickly learned, were iron, and immovable. But I yanked at them a few times; I felt the need of some violent action. The only result was a sharpening of my headache, which had grown dull.

"There is no way out," said Marcos in a dry tone. "This *carcel* was built to hold men, and built well. We examined everything last night."

I made no answer, and we were quiet again. As he said, the place was strongly constructed. The floor was of heavy stones, the walls of hard clay. The wooden bars between us were made from *mora*, or some similar timber, almost as strong as steel; and the one door was probably of the same sort of wood. With nothing but fingernails and muscles as tools, a man could spend a score of years trying to work himself out of that prison. And no prisoner of Funes—or of Matanza—ever had any other tools, nor ever lived so long.

Time dragged away. We all sat or squatted on the stones, dumbly waiting. Then suddenly a chain rattled, a lock clicked harshly, and the door squeaked open.

Outside stood at least a dozen *soldados*, fully armed, quiet, but looking expectantly toward us captives. Into the doorway now stepped Matanza, carrying in his right hand a bare machete, in his left a lighted *cigarrillo*. He stood there for some time—at least, it seemed so—without speaking. A corner of his mean mouth drooped in a fixed sneer. Deliberately he drew several puffs from his cigaret and blew them out. Then, tossing the butt inside, he spoke.

"Traitors, come out!"

Nobody moved. Marcos and Juan and Marcelo stood pale and rigid, looking at him. Vicente shrank into his corner until he seemed only a huddle of dingy clothes.

"There are no traitors here," finally growled Marcos.

"Ho! So?" Matanza's voice was like a snake's hiss. "Then I must call you by name, eh? *Bien.* Marcos and Juan and Marcelo Carasquel, march out! And Vicente Carasquel also!"

After a second of hesitation, the three older brothers walked stiffly to the door and out, Matanza backing away before them. Vicente cowered where he was.

"Vicente Carasquel!" snapped Matanza. Then, to one of the men, "Go inside, you, and kick that dog out here!"

The fellow grinned and swaggered in. But Vicente did not wait to be kicked. With a sort of gasping grunt he dodged away from the *soldado* and ran out into the sun.

"So here we are, my pretty ones!"

Matanza mocked the four. "Loyal brothers, loyal to one another and to the Coronel and to your commandant—"

"Enough of that!" Marcos snapped out. "Get it over with, you *caimán!*"

His voice was strained, but hard and defiant. He knew what was coming; knew there was no hope of evading it. He had seen it done with other men.

Matanza's face tightened.

"So you are in haste?" he said savagely. "You shall not wait long. Go to the *sarrapia* behind the jail!"

With no word of reply, the brothers walked slowly out of my sight, Vicente, last, moving as if about to collapse. The *soldados* slouched after them. The door banged shut, and the clatter of the big lock sounded outside. I was alone.

The thump of that door seemed to wake me out of a daze. I yelled. Nobody heard. I shook the padlocked gate, shoved at it with all my weight. It did not yield. So then I sprang to the window.

There near the *sarrapia* tree were more men of the garrison, two of them holding coils of *chiquechique* rope. One, standing close to the trunk, was grinning in a most evil way as he watched the Carasquels approach. He was that mestizo, Mendez, who had sneaked overland ahead of me to talk away the lives of better men. Now he was plainly enjoying the success of his spy work. But in less than a minute he found it not so pleasant.

Marcos came into my sight, with Marcelo and Juan a pace behind, all walking with steps short and stiff and faces set. A yard from Mendez, Marcos halted and stood a second, glaring at him. The mestizo grinned all the more nastily. Then he lost that grin for good.

With a hoarse grunt Marcos sprang on him, knocking him down and falling with him. Before they hit the ground Marcelo jumped in. The spy gave a yell of fear and pain. Then the three of them were on the dirt, clutching and striking and tearing savagely.

"Stop that!" Matanza yelled, running forward. "Break them, you men! Pull them away!"

The *soldados* obeyed, but very slowly. Several of them moved forward and grasped the two Carasquels, but it was plain that they were in no haste to stop the punishment of the informer, and that they did not try hard to drag off the punishers. Suddenly Mendez screamed horribly. Matanza swore and began beating his men with the flat of his machete. At that they took firmer holds, and soon hauled Marcos and Marcelo clear of their victim.

They might as well have let them finish the job. As a soldier, Mendez was all through. The Carasquels had not had time to kill him outright with bare hands, but they had done the next best thing—gouged both eyes out of his head.

For a few seconds he writhed and yelped on the ground. Then he got to hands and knees and went lurching along with no knowledge of where he was going. His blind course happened to take him straight toward Matanza. And Matanza stood watching him coldly. When the fellow was within arm's length, the *sargento* did a queer thing; queer, because it was almost merciful. He stepped aside, swung up his machete, and chopped down on the back of the sightless man's neck.

The spy's head rolled on the ground. His body gave a jerk, flopped forward, twitched, and lay still.

"Now," said Matanza, languidly, "we shall not have to feed the useless animal."

He slid two fingers along his wet blade, snapped them carelessly downward, wiped them on his trousers. Then he turned his eyes to the hot faced Carasquel boys. At that moment I found my voice.

"Good work, Matanza!" I called. "That mongrel was a sneaking liar, and deserved just what he got. Anything he told you about Marcos and Marcelo and Juan was a malicious lie. He wanted to be corporal at Zamuro. Don't make a fool of yourself by sacrificing the men he lied about!"

"Tie them up," said Matanza, in the same bored way, as if he did not hear me at all. "You, brothers Carasquel, take your places."

He moved his jaw toward the *sarrapia* tree. For a few seconds nobody obeyed him. All peered at him, observing his expression. Then, as if accepting any trivial order of routine duty, the brothers stepped over and stood stiff against the trunk—all but Vicente, who seemed petrified, staring at the gory thing that had been Mendez. Matanza glanced at him, twitched his lips in a crooked smile, and let him stand there. To the *soldados* he made a sign with one finger. This time they obeyed promptly.

The men holding ropes walked quickly around the big trunk. They knew their job; and in no time at all the three brothers were roped tightly to the tree. One cable held all their bodies hard against the bark, about a yard apart. The other, drawn tight across their foreheads, fastened their heads so that they could not duck nor dodge. And there they stood like statues, eyes straight ahead, hands clenched, every muscle braced for the end.

I raved. I yelled that these men were innocent of wrong, of conspiracy, of everything. I called Matanza murderer and assassin and worse. I yanked at the bars until my hands were too numb to hold them. It all did no good whatever. Men looked at me, but the *sargento* did not. He ran a thumb again along the edge of his blade; stepped to one side of Marcos; placed his feet deliberately; swung the machete far out to his right—

I shut my eyes.

Chuck! sounded something.

Ever heard a machete blade go through a man's neck and bite into hard wood behind it? Believe me, *hombre*, you don't want to!

"One!" said Matanza's voice, cold, yet with devilish enjoyment.

A short silence. I didn't look.

Chuck!

"Two!" remarked Matanza.

Another short pause. Then, faint and choking, came another voice—

"O Jesus, receive my soul!"

That was the voice of Juan, who was not quite so hard as Marcos or Marcelo.

Chuck!

"Three," said Matanza.

Then all was dead quiet. I opened my eyes.

The three brothers still stood against the tree. The ropes around chests and foreheads still held them there. But the bodies were limp, the faces blank; and between heads and bodies . . .

Well, never mind.

Matanza was stepping toward Vicente, who was face down on the ground, shaking as if he had ague. The murderous *sargento* was licking his lips, and his eyes were gleaming like those of a *tigre*. His red steel swung up and hung in the air, while every one watched without breathing. Then it sank, very slowly, and came down to Matanza's side.

"Get up!" snarled Matanza.

Vicente gave a shuddering jerk, stared up at him, and scrambled to his knees.

"*Por amor de Dios*, do not kill me!" he screamed, holding his hands over his neck. "I have been faithful—you know I have been faithful—"

"Bah! Get up, dog!"

The machete moved a little. Vicente staggered to his feet and stood swaying.

"You are not so traitorous," Matanza said then, grudgingly. "Or you have not been, thus far."

"I never was—I never will be!" wailed Vicente.

"That is to be seen," the *sargento* grated. "It is in my mind that all your family is in conspiracy against the Coronel. If not, it must be proved by examination. I shall spare you just long enough to let you go home and bring all your family here to be questioned. Then, if I am satisfied, you all shall live. But if not—"

He rubbed his machete against the coward's leg, staining his clothes with the blood of his brothers. At the feel of it Vicente babbled:

"I will, I will, *sargento!* I will bring them all—*sí*, *sí*, I will do anything, anything, as I always have done. I will bring Rita and Pepito—and *padre* and *madre*—and you will be satisfied—"

"Then you live awhile longer," Matanza cut him off. Turning, he ordered, "Loose the ropes!"

Men moved and swung machetes. The ropes sagged. At once the three bodies slid down and lay in a ghastly huddle, and the heads dropped and rolled down a little slope. The head of Marcos stopped almost against that of the eyeless Mendez; and there the two lay face to face, as if still hating each other.

At that I went as limp as the headless things at the base of the tree. My knees gave way, and I flopped down on the stones and lay there. I had had no breakfast, you know, and had taken a nasty crack on the skull, and now I felt sick all over. And I stayed down for quite a long time.

CHAPTER XI

"KEEP AWAKE TILL MOONRISE."

IT was quite late in the day when I took enough interest in life to get up and move around; and even then I felt dull and listless. I had slept a good deal, or lain in a sluggish doze that amounted to sleep, except that it didn't refresh me. The jail was stifling hot, and foul smelling besides, so the air seemed to stupefy me. And, with no hope of breaking out, and nothing to eat or drink, I might as well lie there as try to do anything else.

Finally, though, I grew so uncomfortable that I had to move. The stones hurt me, and a frightful thirst tormented me still more. So I got to my feet and walked up and down a few times. Then I stepped to the window to breathe cleaner air. As I stopped there, one foot touched something that clinked against the wall.

It was a bottle; an old rum bottle, plugged with a tight roll of green leaf. Beside it was a leaf wrapped package, about a foot square and half as thick. Stooping to investigate, I found that the bottle held water, and the bundle was full of cassava. To each of them was attached a thin palm cord, which ran up over the sill of the window.

Quickly I stood up, looked out, pulled in the loose ends of the cords. Nobody was in sight. Nothing was tied to the outer ends of the strings. I spoke, but got no answer; so I knew nobody was under the window or waiting near. There was nothing to look at but the gloomy *sarrapia* tree, and I spent no time staring at that. I had seen more than enough of it.

Squatting, I drank all the water and wished for more. I chewed a little cassava, too, but had no appetite for such dry stuff. The water made me feel better, though; and a *cigarrillo* from my rubber smoke pouch helped still more. When I arose again and carefully worked the bottle cord back outside—so that my unknown friend could draw out the bottle for refilling, if he wished—I felt quite cheerful.

My Guahibo boys probably had smuggled that water and food to me, I thought. It looked like their work. And the jail must be unguarded, or they could not have slipped that stuff through for me in broad daylight—unless the sentry was a good fellow who looked the other way while they worked. With that thought in mind, I called again, not too loudly. But again there was no answer.

"Well," says I to myself, "it's not long till night now, and something may develop after dark."

Then I stood there smoking and thinking.

Just what could develop in my favor was hard to guess, unless it was another drink of river water. Even if my Guahibo boys should creep up and kill any Funes man watching the jail—as they were quite capable of doing, in spite of his rifle—they still could not unlock the door; a sentry would hardly have the key on him. And until that door was unlocked, and the cell gate as well, I should have to stay where I was. On the other hand, if water and food should keep coming to me it would take Matanza much longer to starve me than he expected.

Standing there and scowling again at the *sarrapia*, I wondered what he really

meant to do with me. Everything indicated that he was keeping his promise to let me rot in jail. But that would get him nothing but my cargo of personal supplies, and the satisfaction of proving his power and glutting the hate he seemed to have for me. If he hated me half as much as I now hated him, that sort of revenge might be worth his while. But his taste plainly ran more to bloodshed, to the massacre his name stood for, than to slow starvation of an enemy. Perhaps, though, he planned to torture me a few days with hunger and thirst and then behead me against that tree yonder—and the rest of the Carasquel family with me. After seeing what he had done that morning, I could believe him capable of slaying man, woman, or child with no more compunction than Coronel Funes himself.

But did the fool really suppose that the remaining Carasquels would leave Babilla Flaca and come to him to be killed? Evidently he did, or he would not have sent Vicente after them. He must be mad. Yet, the more I thought about it, the more I began to see method in his madness.

Like Funes, he firmly believed in ruling by terror. And in Funes's case that sort of rule certainly worked well. When the tyrant ordered people to come they came, even though they knew he probably would kill them. So Matanza, working on the same principle, believed that his killing of the three strongest Carasquels would terrify the weaker members of the family into absolute subjection; that they would come because they dared not stay away, if not for the sake of saving the life of Vicente. So he would get Rita into his clutch.

That, I felt, was his main motive in all this bloody work: to get that girl, take revenge for her contempt of him, degrade her until she was less than nothing, and so satisfy his hellish conceit and pride. What he would do to the old folks and to the child Pepito would depend largely on his mood. But his probable treatment of Rita was plain enough in my mind, and I squirmed as I thought of it.

I stopped my thinking right there. It would not do me or any one else any good to torture myself with imagination. Neither was it of any use to blame myself—as I started to do—for bringing about the deaths of the three Carasquels by talking to them at Zamuro. That was not the cause of their executions, I felt sure; it was only the excuse for which Matanza had been waiting. He must have marked them for death some time before that—probably after Vicente reported the failure of his mission at Babilla Flaca—and been trying to goad them into some word or act that would enable him to cut them up. If I had not come into the matter, he would have found some other way to get them. And now it was all over for them; they were out of his reach forever.

I turned away from the window, sat down under it with my back against the wall, and tried to keep my mind blank and go to sleep again. After awhile I succeeded in dozing, and time went without my knowing it. The next thing I realized was that something near me was making an odd tinkle.

Opening my eyes, I found the jail black. Night had come. The tinkling noise came from the empty bottle. Somebody outside was gently shaking the cord, making the glass ring against the wall like a dull, small bell.

"*Hola!*" I called, starting up.

The sound stopped. All was very quiet. Then a low voice said—

"Scott?"

"*Sí!*"

"Keep awake until moonrise."

"I will," I promised. "What news?"

No answer. The bottle dropped on my foot. I called again. Nobody replied. Nothing could be seen in the darkness. The man had gone.

I picked up the bottle, hoping to find more water in it. But it was empty. So I sat again, smoked again, and wondered.

The man who had spoken was no Guahibo. He spoke Spanish, not the Indian dialect. The voice was unfamiliar. Whoever he was, he must be a friend.

He had known the bottle was there; so he must be the one who had put it there, or, at least, have allowed my men to do it. But what did he mean by this warning? Was Matanza coming to kill me secretly? That seemed unlikely; the *sargento* would much rather exhibit his deadliness in public than stab in the dark. I was much mystified.

I got up again and felt along the sill, thinking that a knife or a revolver might have been laid there for me to find. But nothing was there. I pulled at the cord, too; but its lightness proved that nothing was attached to it. So then I leaned there breathing the night air, listening, and watching for the moon.

It was a long time in coming, but I continued to stand, so that I should not doze again. So far as I could hear, nobody came near. The only sounds that came to me were from a distance. Then, at last, the darkness thinned. The *sarrapia* tree took shape, black and depressing in the dimness. The light increased until I could see quite plainly. A little more time passed. Then the lock clicked.

I swung around. The door slowly opened, squeaking a little. Into the opening came the black shape of a *soldado*, with rifle loose in one fist. He stepped inside, came to the cell gate and paused.

"Ready?" he asked.

"For what?" I replied.

"To walk."

"Where?"

"Salvajito."

I peered at him, making out nothing except that he was short and heavily built.

"Salvajito? Humph!" said I. "What's your game?"

"No game," he denied. "Except this—Matanza is at Zamuro. If you would get on up the river, now is your time."

I could hardly believe that he was setting me free. But, looking beyond him, I saw nobody outside the door.

"Good," said I. "Open the gate."

"One moment," he said. "You will walk straight to Salvajito. Keep going. Ask no questions. I shall be behind you all the way."

"Good," I repeated. "You are, perhaps, a friend of the Carasquels?"

"I told you to ask no questions!" he growled.

"*Bien.* I ask no more."

I shut my mouth. He fumbled with a key, found the hole, sprung the lock, stepped to one side. I unwound the chain, taking care to make little noise. Then, still suspicious of some trick, I threw the gate back hard and jumped for the door. In three bounds I was outside the jail.

Nobody else was there. Behind me, the *soldado* laughed as if much amused by my distrust. He came out, swung the door shut, locked it, carefully pocketed the key, and faced me.

"*Vaya!*" he grunted; and, after one more look at him, I went, marveling.

So far as I could make out, he was no friend of mine. But I could not see his face. His sombrero was pulled low, and under it I saw only a red handkerchief, covering all below his hat hidden eyes. As for his size and shape, there were a dozen men like him thereabouts.

"Keep near the trees," he added. And we walked away, heading southward, and traveling in the shadows until well away from the town. Then I swung over to the cart road, where the footing was better. And from that time until we drew near Salvajito I never paused, nor even looked back. My ears told me that he was plodding along not far in the rear, so there was little sense in glancing around at him; and, after the way he had laughed at my dash out of jail, I didn't wish to seem nervous.

But when we had passed through the savanna and nearly reached the woods at Salvajito, I stopped and turned. He too stopped, a few yards away.

"*Amigo*," said I, "I don't know who you are, and I ask no questions on that point. But Sixto Scott pays his debts. I owe you a good deal. How can I make it right with you?"

He answered as if he had been expecting something of the kind.

"Some day I may remind you of this," he said. "Until then you can pay best

by forgetting everything since you came ashore at Zamuro."

"Agreed," I said. "And whenever you need a friend who will do as much for you—or more—let me know."

"I will," he promised.

I moved on. There was no more to be said just then.

We came to the guard house at Salvajito—the only house there—and I slowed up, expecting to be challenged. But no sentry was in sight.

"Go on," said the man behind me. "To the water."

So I did. And there, on my own piragua, were my Guahibo boys, silently waiting.

"*Por Dios!*" I exclaimed. "This is a miracle!"

"Almost," said my masked guard. "Get aboard and get out. And take this with you. It is yours. *Adios!*"

And he laid the rifle on the ground and walked away, heading back to Atures.

I stood there staring like an idiot until he was out of sight. Then I grabbed the gun and walked fast across the plank to the boat. The Indians hauled in the plank, picked up their poles and shoved off. And under the pale moon we went crawling away up the river, with never a shot nor a shout from behind us.

That part of the river is no place to travel at night; full of rocks and all pole work. But we did travel it that night. Those boys of mine are wizards at that sort of thing, and cat eyed besides. And they poled along until moonset, near daybreak, when we drew up into a twisty creek and took some rest. Then I asked my head man—

"Is anything to eat in the cabin?"

"Yes," he said. "All is there."

I stared at him. Then I crawled in under the palm roof and lit a match. And there, true enough, was all my cargo.

It was unbelievable. I had thought myself lucky to be free, with my gun and my crew and my boat, and had given no thought to the loss of my supplies. But they were not lost. Nothing was gone but the case of fancy food and, as I later learned, the case of rum.

The Indians said they had been ordered by some man—not Matanza—to load those things into a cart, at headquarters, near sundown. Then the cart had been driven to Salvajito, where they had been commanded to load my boat and wait on it, not going ashore for any purpose. For a time they had been watched by an armed man of the Salvajito outpost; but a little after moonrise that watchman had withdrawn, and they had seen no other man until I arrived.

That was all they knew—except that Matanza, with several men, had gone northward, toward Zamuro, before noon; and that the bottle of water and the cassava had been, as I suspected, brought to me by two of my boys. A Funes man had seen them do this, but had not interfered. He was, they said, a short, heavy man, with a big mustache.

That description fitted the appearance of the chap who had set me free, except that I knew nothing of the mustache. But I have never learned whether he was the same man. I've never seen my liberator since that night, not heard anything from him or about him. Nor have I ever learned why he did it.

There was some reason for his action, of course. But I'm quite sure it was not friendship for me or for the Carasquels. The fellow may possibly have liked all of us, may have wished to spite Matanza. That could explain his action in opening the jail for me. But it could hardly account for the loading of my goods at headquarters in daylight, the cartage overland without interference, the convenient absence of any guard to challenge us at Salvajito. To achieve all that, even in the absence of the *sargento*, would require strong authority—as strong as Matanza's, or stronger. And, queer as it may seem, I am forced to believe that the authority behind the mystery was that of Matanza himself.

Perhaps, with his bloodthirst temporarily slaked, he had thought about me with cool common sense and decided that

it would be wiser not to take my life also. Perhaps he doubted that Funes would be pleased by his maltreating a Colombian of good repute, even though there was apparent proof of smuggling; the Coronel might feel that such a smuggler should have been brought to San Fernando for him to deal with, and that the *sargento* was assuming too much authority —which was usually a fatal thing for any subordinate to do. So he considered it wisest to turn me loose. But, not wishing to give me whatever satisfaction I might get from a public release, he preferred to let me sneak away in the night and left orders concerning me and my goods with the heavy chap, who attended to the matter in his absence.

The only other explanation I could invent seemed very improbable, though not impossible: that the heavy fellow was Funes himself, who had made one of his sudden trips to Atures, found Matanza gone, learned about me from the corporal left in charge and amused himself by stealthily letting me out and guarding me overland. It would be a queer thing for the savage Coronel to do; but he did many queer things, being, as I've said before, at least half mad. I happen to know that Funes had a heavy build and a huge mustache. The secrecy of my release, the masking to hide his identity, the request to forget, would be quite like him.

Whoever that fellow was, I kept my promise to him. When I reached Maipures I said nothing to the commandant there about the events at Atures. I passed on up-stream and into my Vichada wilderness as usual. And I heard nothing more about Matanza or the Carasquels until months later, when I came out with my next cargo of hammocks.

Then I learned of one thing that did not surprise me, and of another that did.

CHAPTER XII

"I AM HEAD OF THIS FAMILY."

VICENTE Carasquel went home on the morning when his brothers were killed. With him went the same corporal who had visited Babilla Flaca before, and four other men, all armed. What orders the *soldados* had, aside from guarding Vicente, I don't know. But when the landing was made they stayed on the ship, and only the corporal went with Vicente to the house.

As it happened, the boy Pepito had seen the boat approach and had recognized Vicente aboard. So his father had not taken down my gun, which he kept loaded and hidden on a shelf of canes overhead. It also happened that he had other visitors at the moment—three strong fellows from across the river, one of whom had recently become interested in Rita. None of the callers had a gun, but all were wearing their machetes. And there they all sat when Vicente and his guarding corporal came in.

Vicente was no such swaggering bluffer now as on his other visit. He was unarmed, and so weak from fear that his feet dragged. And the minute he entered the house he blurted out what Matanza had done to his brothers and why he was there.

The family was stunned. Father Carasquel sank back in his hammock and lay there looking at the roof. The mother gave one moan and then went to slow, quiet weeping. Rita, for once, had no words; she sat staring and silent, as did Pepito. The three visitors scowled at one another, at Vicente, and at the corporal. The corporal scowled back at them and stood with a hand near his revolver, but said nothing. Nobody spoke but Vicente.

"You must go with me," he kept insisting, "and satisfy the commandant of our loyalty, or I too shall be killed! I shall be killed!"

At length Father Carasquel sat up again, looking at the corporal.

"Is this true?" he asked.

"True," answered the corporal, short and hard.

The old man looked at his fear ridden son; then, slowly, at the rest of his family. After that he sat straighter and grasped his stick, ready to rise.

"You know very well," he said, speaking again to the corporal, "that we who do not live in Amazonas do not owe any allegiance to Funes, or any explanation of what we do. You also know well that no son of mine who has joined Funes has been false to his duty; and so does that Matanza of whom you speak. You both know that this thing has been a filthy murder, nothing less. But since the life of another son of mine hangs in the balance, I will go to see that Matanza."

"*Bien.*" The corporal grinned. "And the others of your family go also."

"No," refused Carasquel. "A sick old woman, a girl, and a small boy shall go to that bloody beast? No! I am the head of this family. I will speak for all of it."

"That was not the order," the corporal growled. And Vicente wailed:

"No, *padre*, that was not the order! You all must go! If you and I alone go we are dead men!"

"Neither of us is of any use to the world," the old man coldly told him. "You and I alone go. I want some words with that Matanza before I die. The others stay at home."

Then up spoke one of the three from across the river—the one who liked Rita.

"And you too shall stay at home, Padre Carasquel! Why throw away the few years left you in order to save this—"

"Shut your mouth!" snarled the corporal.

The west side man sprang up, and his two comrades with him, hands on machetes.

"Shut it for me, if you are man enough!" he invited.

They stood and glared. The corporal fingered his revolver, but did not draw it. There were three machetes to face, and hard eyed *hombres* to use them, and they were close.

Down on the piragua he had four riflemen, and one yell would have brought them. But that would not save his own life. And there were other considerations. Although those four gunmen could have shot everybody present, there were Funes's standing orders against killing people outside Amazonas—at least, without a command from Funes himself. And, whatever Matanza's orders might have been, Matanza was only a *sargento*. All of which gave the corporal something to think about. And while he was thinking Rita found her tongue.

"No!" she cried, springing up and seizing her father. "You shall not go, *padre!* None of us shall go! I know what that Matanza wants—and he won't get it! And it would be useless suicide for you to go, and you shall not!"

She forced him back in the hammock. She was young and strong; he was too weak to resist; and, though he commanded her to let him up, she held him there.

"But they will kill me!" screamed Vicente. That was all he could think of. "They will kill me, unless you—"

"Go and jump off the bank!" Rita screamed back. "You are no man—you never were a man—you never will be a man! If you have not enough courage to fight for your life, or even to run from those who would kill you, go drown yourself! You shall not drag our father to death with you!"

Vicente sprang at her. But the chap who had defied the corporal knocked him back. The other two west bank men quietly drew their machetes. The corporal, watching all like a hawk, sized up the situation speedily. He had a head on him, and knew when the game was up.

He shrugged. Then he spoke sharply.

"Vicente! Return to the *piragua!*"

"But let me talk to them!" screeched Vicente. "They will come—let me talk—"

"You have already talked too much!" snapped the corporal. "*Vaya!*"

And, after a terrified stare at him, Vicente went. He staggered dumbly to the *piragua*, while the corporal, keeping an eye behind him, followed. And nobody except his father, too feeble to escape the grip of the determined girl who held him down, said a word or lifted a hand for the fellow who had joined the

Funes army to eat and was now to find the dessert bitter.

The boat sailed away. Soon afterward the wind died, and the ship had to anchor a league up-stream and lie there all night. Whether Vicente lacked courage to jump overboard before morning, or whether he was lashed to the mast to prevent it, I don't know. But he was still on board the next day, when the voyage ended at Zamuro. And there Matanza, who had been waiting to welcome the rest of the Carasquels in his own way at the guard house where Marcos had been corporal, wasted no more time on him.

With his own hands the *sargento* tied the writhing poltroon to the nearest tree. Then he set his feet carefully, swung his machete out to the right, and—

Chuck!

CHAPTER XIII

"WE HAVE WAITED A LONG TIME—"

AFTER that time, Matanza let the surviving Carasquels alone.

He was convinced that none of them would come to him, he knew it was hazardous to go to them, and so he stopped his game where it was. Maybe he heard something from Coronel Funes that made him cautious, or maybe not. But he sent no more boats nor men to Babilla Flaca.

Time slid along, as it's always doing. And then came this thing which you, perhaps, might call "coincidence".

Matanza still stood well with Funes—at least, as far as duty was concerned. And it happened that the Coronel needed to send a very secret special message, by a most trustworthy messenger, to an agent of his in Bolívar. Oh, yes, the old cutthroat had agents as far off as that, and much farther, too; from Caracas, on the coast, to Manaos, on the Amazon. It was from Manaos that he got his arms and ammunition, paying with Venezuelan rubber. And as for Caracas, I've told you that he was always trying for official recognition from President Gomez. However, that doesn't matter. His message this time was to somebody in Bolívar. And he entrusted it to no less a personage than the Atures commandant, Matanza.

He wanted speedy delivery, of course. So Matanza went in a *falca*—a dugout, you know, with high gunwales of boards, much safer in the waves of this lower river than the ordinary deep riding *curial*. A sailing *piragua* would have been more comfortable, naturally, but nowhere near so fast, as the east wind would have been dead against it most of the way down. Matanza was so intent on speed that he even dispensed with the low cabin in which the master of a *falca* usually takes shelter from the sun; for he knew this would catch enough of the wind to slow him down by several miles a day. With his boat stripped for action, and eight strong paddlers and a wide awake steersman, he set out to cover those four hundred odd miles in record time. And, what's more, he did.

Quite likely he wondered, as he slid along down here and looked at the huts along shore, which one of them was named Babilla Flaca. He had never been there himself, you know. And to a man out on the river all those little places look alike. But if he thought of Rita and the other Carasquels he asked no questions. That conceited pride of his would prevent him from asking, even if he wanted to; for any such inquiry would remind his men that he had twice failed to make that family come to him, and a failure was the last thing he would wish his men to remember. Besides, he may have known that Rita, the only one there in whom he had had any real interest, was there no longer.

She had gone to live across the river with the young fellow who had been courting her and who could feed her well. So the only people now at Babilla Flaca were the old man, no longer able to walk; and the old woman, not much better; and the boy Pepito, the only able bodied one of the three. Rita and her man often came across by canoe and brought food to the old folks, but she was through with living at that starved house. And quite

likely Matanza, hearing most of the river gossip brought up by travelers and beef boats, had learned of this.

Anyway, he kept his mouth shut and drove his men to Bolívar. And as soon as his business was done he got out of there and started back. Funes men were not popular at Bolívar—or anywhere else, for that matter—and they knew it. And of course they had to go unarmed while they were there, and an unarmed Funes man within reach of a federal garrison would be about as comfortable as a toothless snake near a herd of peccaries. So they didn't linger.

Coming back, they could not travel so fast, as they had to buck a strong current. Back in the hills the wet season had started, and the river flow was growing more powerful all the time. But down here the sky still was clear, and the sun as fierce as ever. And Matanza, sitting still in the open *falca* all day long, day after day, got the full force of the sun. So did his paddlers, of course. But somehow a man riding idle in a small boat without shade seems to suffer more from sun heat than if he worked. Maybe it's because action makes a chap sweat more healthily; I don't know. Anyway, Matanza got more of the burning breath of hell during that voyage than he had ever felt.

Now that he was up-bound, with the wind astern, he could have carried a little cabin to good advantage. It would have protected him and might have helped his crew a bit by giving the wind something to push against. But he gave no orders to make one. Probably his pride wouldn't let him. To put up a shelter for himself now, while his men were paddling unprotected, would look like a confession that he could not endure as much as they. And, to a man whose fixed ambition was to appear harder and tougher than any one under his command, that was impossible. Instead, he sneered and swore at his *soldados* whenever they showed signs of fatigue, calling them weaklings and worms and worse, and showing no mercy to them or to himself.

So they crawled along, fighting the river and roasting alive. The farther upstream they went, the worse the sun grew, because, above Caicara, the cooling wind was weakened by the mountains away at the east. And after turning southward they had to paddle close under the east bank in order to get the advantage of the shore eddies, and there they got no breeze at all. By the time they reached this section, where we are now, the men were so worn down by heat and labor that their tempers were murderous, and they muttered to one another at night, discussing the plan of knifing Matanza in his sleep. But there was no chance of that. Matanza's nerves were so raw from continuous daily exposure that he didn't sleep. He only dozed, starting awake at the slightest movement or sound near him. Learning this, the men slept as much as they could by night and carried on grimly by day.

Then, about the middle of the forenoon on a day hotter than ever, Matanza cracked under the strain.

"I am sick!" he suddenly groaned. "Put me ashore!"

The men stared at him. He was ghastly pale, his eyes were dull, and his skinny body sagged as if his bones were only gristle. They grunted, well enough pleased to see him suffer and hear him admit weakness, and more pleased by the chance to get ashore and rest in shade. Then they looked for a landing place.

"There is a port ahead, you damned eyeless slugs!" he croaked. "Get there *muy pronto!*"

They got there at double time, as anxious to reach shelter as he. An old *curial* floated there, and a path went up the sloping shore, and at the top of it a boy stood staring at them. Matanza crawled ashore at once, looked dully up at the boy, and, saying nothing, went staggering up the path. The boy gave back, as if scared; then turned and ran.

The crew, after tying their canoe, climbed after the *sargento*. But they went only to the top of the bank, turning to the shade of a near tree. Matanza had

stopped there for a few seconds; but now he went on. A little house stood a few yards away, and he wanted to get inside and lie in a hammock.

He walked to the door, putting a hand to the butt of his revolver as he stepped in. Then—

Bang!

Matanza fell backward and lay still. His face was blown off.

The paddlers, just dropping to rest, sprang up and stood staring. They saw the boy, with shotgun still held tight to his shoulder, come out and stand there, face hard as a stone, watching the dead man. Slowly he let the empty weapon down. And, with a voice as hard as his face, he called:

"*Padre!* I have killed the poison snake, Matanza!"

Then the Funes men ran at him. He did not give back an inch.

"What does this mean, you little devil?" one yelled.

"It means," they boy snapped back at him, "that this thing killed my four brothers and wanted to kill the rest of us. We have been waiting a long time for him to come. And—"

"Who are you?" another man interrupted.

"Pepito Carasquel!" said the boy, glaring at him. "Brother of Marcos and Juan and Marcelo Carasquel! And—" he hesitated, as if ashamed—"and of Vicente Carasquel."

The men looked at one another, and at the bloody thing that had been their commandant, and at the child who had killed him. There was a long silence, while they thought things over.

"*Cra!*" one said then. "The *niño* is a man! And he had a right to kill Matanza four times over. And I am not sorry to have seen it done."

"Nor I!" came a sudden chorus. "To hell with Matanza!"

"Come, let us throw him into the river, where some *caimán* can take care of him," added one of them. "I have done enough sweating for this misbegotten without burying him!"

And so they did. After plundering the body of everything worth taking, they dragged it to the water and pitched it in. Meanwhile Pepito hastily reloaded his gun, and when they came back he stood in the doorway, on guard. He would not let them come in to talk to his father. He damned them, and he damned Funes, and ordered them to be gone. So, after bantering him a bit, they went back to the tree and rested and talked it over until they felt like going. Then they went.

So that was the end of Matanza. Father Carasquel died, too, about a month later, but with a smile on his face. His wife lived only a few weeks after him. Then Pepito crossed the river to stay; and he's there yet, living with Rita and her man. Now Babilla Flaca is nothing but an empty house and a name.

EPILOGUE

WELL, there you are, *hombre*. There's a "coincidence" for you.

In all this long stretch of river, with houses and huts and hovels scattered here and there, and other landing ports where nobody lives, Matanza had to go ashore at that one small spot where vengeance waited. Half a mile above it or below it he would have been safe from any penalty for his murders of the Carasquels. But that was the place where he had to land. More than that, he had to do it at a moment when Pepito was idling there ready to recognize him, instead of working back on the plantation; at a time, too, when he himself was so dull eyed that he failed to remember the boy and realize where he was. If he had known he was at Babilla Flaca he would have been more alert, even if he had been twice as sick as he was.

It had to happen, too, that a loaded gun was there, waiting for him; and that I had felt generous enough to give that gun to Padre Carasquel—and it's decidedly unusual for me to give things to anybody on short acquaintance. And, furthermore, I had to win that gun gam-

ing at Bolívar, when I didn't want the thing.

Well, now, who or what was it that put those various things together to finish Matanza? What was it that suddenly broke his pride at that one place, compelled him to admit weakness before his men, drove him into the muzzle of that heavy loaded gun? Coincidence? I don't believe it, *amigo*. I'm not saying what it was, but I dare you to look me in the eye and say it was just coincidence. No, I'm not religious. But there is something, somewhere, that takes hold of things and makes them work out. Name it yourself. But don't call it luck, or chance, or coincidence. It's bigger than that. Think it over.

SIXTO stretched himself, stood up and took a long, slow look from south to north. Too lazy to arise, I sat where I was, but let my eyes drift along the same monotonous scene. Babilla Flaca had long passed from sight. But, on either shore, a few other huts of the same type had crept past while he talked; and two or three more were dimly visible at far intervals. Only an expert eye could distinguish one from another. And to the eye of any man unacquainted with each and half blind with solar fever . . .

I said nothing more about coincidence. I said nothing at all. As Sixto had advised, I thought it over. And, though five years have passed since then, I am still thinking.

FROBISHER'S GOLD RUSH

By Donald A. Cadzow

FROBISHER BAY on the southeast coast of Baffin Island was the scene of North America's first gold rush.

In the bark *Gabriel*, Frobisher explored the bay named after him in 1576. And while so doing he collected tokens to carry back to England. Among these tokens was a live Eskimo and a piece of stone of great weight. The Eskimo died soon after reaching England. The stone was accidently dropped into a fire, and upon being recovered it presented an appearance something like gold. Certain refiners of London said that the stone did contain gold, and an expedition was quickly organized to obtain more of the precious metal.

On May 31st, 1577 Frobisher set sail with three vessels and arrived in his bay on the 19th of July. A very rich mine of ore was soon discovered and twenty tons taken on board the vessels. By the latter part of August, after several brushes with the Eskimos, in one of which Frobisher was wounded by an arrow, two hundred tons of ore were loaded on the ships and sail was made for England.

The show of ore in London caused so much excitement that by May 1578 a fleet of fifteen vessels was ready to sail for the goldfields. It was proposed to establish a colony on an island in the Countess of Warwick's Sound near which the ore was found.

In August the ships arrived at their destination and the second colony on the North American continent took root, the first being established just a few years before at St. Augustine, Florida. The Baffin Island attempt at colonization was not successful.

Frobisher's gold ore turned out to be iron pyrites and mica. And, like other dreamers of new empires, Frobisher lanquished in disgrace and died.

BUG EYE *among the* SOO

LETTERS OF A WANDERING PARTNER

By Alan LeMay

? ? ? ? ?
Erly Fall,
1878.

DEER Bug Eye, See them qweschin marks Bug Eye. I put them in temporary, an I wil rub them out an put in the rite name of this plase as soon as I find out ware I am at. I still do not noe how I am goin to get any mor leters frum me to you without noein ware eether 1 of us is at, but I never giv up hope Bug Eye, I wil think of a way.

Yesterdy I rote a leter telin you how cum I am lost in the Black Hills, but that leter is not in existunce any mor, it was rote on berch bark an I had to use it to make a fire. But anyway it told about how I lernt you was in jale, an wy I was delaid in cumin to get you out. It was a good goke on you Bug Eye, bein in jale becaus they thout you was me. Speshully since I was a innisent man in the 1st plase Bug Eye. I do not dout you deserved to be in jale al rite al rite, but not becaus you was me becaus you aint, an even if you was that woud not be a good reeson. An that is ware the goke cums in, see the point Bug Eye.

Wel anyway Bug Eye I cum down to ware you was in jale wen I herd they was goin to set fire to it with you in it. An I resked my own life aimin to get you out, ony to find you had got exsited an got yerself out an escaiped. An a angry mob chaised me backards an forards an forced me to throe my satchel of gold into sum crick sumwares an giv me no peese until I didunt noe ware I was or ware any plase else was neether. An heer I am warever that is.

Finly I kiled a cow moose with a rok an eet it, an the Injuns stole my horse Wilbur, the 1 with the week legs. An that is about al the news Bug Eye exsep last nite after I had rote you the leter I herd a Injun in the brush, an I rosh out an hung my hat on a bush, an then snoke

qwitely around in back of the Injun an wen he had shot a hole throo my hat I jumped on him an took his powder an lead away an tied him to a tree to think it over.

I woud not menshun that Bug Eye, things like that is practicly a evryday ocurnse in this darn country, but I put it down heer becaus I want you to noe I am stil alive an kikin an hav a gun. An if you are stil telin evry 1 you see that you are goin to hit me with a ax, wy you beter think beter of it, that is al I hav to say. Peepul that taik atitoods like you taik tord yer pore pardner is lible to cum out much the werse fer ware. Reed that agen Bug Eye, an think it over very cairful.

Yr. Obeedint Servint,

—HANK.

Cheese Cloth,
Erly September, 1878.

DEER Bug Eye,

Hallyloogy Bug Eye I hav reeched sivilizashun at last, or anyway sumthin that passes fer it, an I am a hapy man. This is the 1st time in a long wile that I am abel to say I am in sutch an sutch a plase Bug Eye, a pertickler plase, an noe fer sertin that I am speekin the trooth. I am in Cheese Cloth Bug Eye, that is ware I am, an I am proud to say so with ful confidunts that this time I am rite.

You wil say ware the hel is Cheese Cloth. It is on the Moose River Bug Eye an it is a new town that they hav jest started up becaus sumbudy thout they found sum gold in Moose River. You must hav cum throo it last week Bug Eye wen fleein fer yer life, it is about in line with ware you was heded wen last seen. Ony you did not see it Bug Eye, it was not ther then, they ony put it up day befour yesterdy about noon, an even now they hav not got it finished, new fellers keep cumin in an makin it biger.

They cal the new town Cheese Cloth Bug Eye because that is wat it seems to be made of. It is reely made of flowr sacks an even sum canvas, but you cant tel the difrunce a littel ways off. They hav lerned beter than to go to werk an put up log bildings wen they start a town out heer Bug Eye. Wen they 1st started Peg Leg they sed this is the reel plase ware al the gold is at, we wil dig in heer an stay until rich. An then wen they found Hen crick they sed no we was rong, this is the reel plase, this time we hav made no mistaik. But now ther is ony about 6 fellers left in Peg Leg an 11 in Hen Crick an ony 1 sloon in eech plase an they are al the rest in Cheese Cloth I gess, uperds of 600 fellers.

You wil say wat is this country cumin to, soon it wil be al bilt up solid an no plase fer trapin. Don't wery Bug Eye, cum winter ther wil be plenty trapin rite along the mane st. of Hen Crick, a feler told me he shot a bare in the Hen Crick post offis jest as he was leevin.

Frum now on the towns is goin to be bilt of flowr sacks so they can be mooved ware needed. An if you got any flowr sacks on you wy hang onto them, they is werth mor than pelts.

Nobudy has sed anythin to me about bein the Hoozer Jint or robin the Dedwood Coach, I gess they hav desided to let bygones be bygones, an it is a good thing fer them. Persnly I stand redy an wilin to drop the hole afare if they wil do the saim. But they had beter not start shootin at me agen.

Yr. Obeedint Servint, —HANK.

P S Now that I noe ware I am Bug Eye it is ony needful to find out ware you are, then we can hav our fite, it had beter be to a finish this time. An wen you hav takun yer likin like a man we can get back on a pardnership bassis agen. Sinse I left you on Elk Mountin I hav not ben mobed 1nst without thinkin "I coud handel this beter if I had anuther feller to help me." I coud hav got me plenty pardners Bug Eye, pardners like me is in big demand. But I do not want any of these littel short fellers, I want a life size feller, even if I hav to hav 1 that is mor than avrige homely. An you are the ony medjum size 7 foot feller I hav seen sense I left pa an the boys, back in Single Tree Indianna. —HANK.

Cheese Cloth, Blak Hills,
Erly fall, 1878.

DEER Bug Eye,

I do not noe wat we woud do without the Perkins boy, Bug Eye. He shoed up this mornin with yer leter, an I hav hired him to taik you the anser.

In the 1st plase Bug Eye I am glad to see that you hav cum to yer senses an no longer aim to hit yer pore pardner (me) with a ax. That was a foolish noshun at best Bug Eye, an I am glad to see you hav now overcum yer indigeschin an are in yer rite mind.

I must say Bug Eye I do not noe wat you meen wen you say you are perpared to fergiv al. I do not see ware they was anythin to fergiv. I noe I was delaid 3 4 munths getin back to Elk Mowntin with the grub, an I admit I was also delaid wen you was in jale in Peg Leg watin to be hanged an holerin to be got out. But I hav explaned the reesons fer that befour Bug Eye, an anyway jest as I expected you got along al rite on yer own hook, as soon as you see I was not goin to wate on you hand an foot.

I shoud be the 1 to fergiv you Bug Eye fer shiftin al round the country an brakin yer werd, about stayin put til I cum. You hav caused me no end of unneedless bother Bug Eye but I am a broad minded man as you ougt to noe frum long expeerence an I wil leeve you off this time if you wil try to do beter frum now on.

2lly Bug Eye. I see ware you tel in yer leter about sum wild skeem you hav fer getin muney away frum the Injuns. It is pritty hard to tel wat you are drivin at Bug Eye. You are about as long winded a feller as ever I see.

You mope around al winter long without nuthin to say, but leeve you get hold of a stub pensil an off you go, you are good fer al nite. An the spelin is a site Bug Eye, a disgrase to yer home state. Sum of the things you rote dont meen nuthin to me, or anybudy els eether, I bet you woud not noe wat you was trine to say yerself. Frinsance Bug Eye, wat in al hel do you meen ware you say "Preech in 2 Seux is hawks leg Mut Soze wiz Hee." Wat in time is a Seuks Bug Eye an ware does hawks legs cum in. I spose that last werd is wisky but that is about al I can maik out. An I coudent even hav got that much Bug Eye if I had not noen you.

3lly Bug Eye. I am a determin man an I think I noe wat you are drivin at, see if this is it. You hav notised that tradin with Injuns is much eesier ware mishunaries hav ben in an made them mor peesabul. An you hav figgered out that the best thing to trade Injuns is wisky. So you hav started preechin to the Injuns ware you are, to make the rode cleer, an wen you hav them converted you want I shoud bring the wisky up ther an trade it fer evrythin the Injuns hav got.

Bug Eye I sernly hope I hav misred. That is the lowest down plan I hav ever herd Bug Eye, wat kine of a scoundrel hav you becum. In the 1st plase you are setin up to be sumthin that you aint. An in the 2st plase you are doin it in hope of profit, I am skandelized Bug Eye. Let me reepeet, skandelized. The 1st prinsipul of mishunaries is that they are sposed to help others without doin therselves no good, or ther famlyes neether. In the 3st plase you are ony fritterin awy yer time, who ever herd of a Injun havin to be converted in order to trade wisky.

An lastly Bug Eye if we are goin to trade wisky to the Injuns you are goin to cum down heer an help tote the wisky, wat kine of sucker do you think I am. We are not goin into any mor of these skeems ware I do al the werk an you eet 3 ¼s of the grub. It looks very much to me Bug Eye as if al this mishunary talk is aimed to get me mixed up, so that I wil not notis that I am the 1 that is taikin al the chances. Sumtimes you almost maik me mad Bug Eye, you lazy lumicks, you.

—Yr. Respeckful and Obeedint
Servint,
HANK.

Cheese Cloth, Blak Hils,
September 1878.

DEER Bug Eye,

I thout I woud die laffin at that Perkins boy Bug Eye. He cum galpin into Cheese Cloth on foot, an I was serprised to see he had made such good time frum heer to the Soo Injuns an back agen, until I see wat condishun he was in. The varmints was hot on his trale, but ony cot him jest outside of the town.

He was a site Bug Eye, he was warin nuthin but a soot of underware, the Injuns had took everthin els he had, an he was blubberin an holerin bludy merder the Soo is upon us, run, run fer yer life. An as he cum up befour the mane sloon he stagered around an clapsed on his back, an he cum down on a sharp rok, an let out anuther yel an jumped up agen, an looked around fer a beter plase to lite, an clapsed agen as soon as he had found a good 1.

Wel we caried him into a sloon Bug Eye, he carrin on sumthin teribil, but wen we had got sum wisky into him he seemed to feel beter an set up an looked around. Direckly he saw me he sed Hay giv me my muney heer is yer leter frum Bug Eye.

I sed you wil hav to wate until the end of the munth, pay day is at the end of the munth. He sed no I am qwitin now, ware is my 8 dolars. Wel Bug Eye I did not have 8 dolars, I did not even hav 1 dolar. Al I coud do was tern around an wauk out in a dignyfied silence. An I hav ben dodgin the Perkins boy around Cheese Cloth ever since.

Now heer is wat I am drivin at Bug Eye.

I see in yer leter ware you are not getin along very wel in the mishunary bizness. Last wk, you was goin to convert the Soo Injuns an make tradin eesy, an you wanted I shoud cum up an trade them wisky fer ther varus bulongins. You was goin to acomplish grate things you was, an make us both rich men al over agen.

An now I see ware you hav changed yer toon Bug Eye, you want I shoud bring wisky up ther an giv it to the Injuns fer nuthin, sos they wil leeve you loose. It seems to me you must hav lost yer infloonce with the Soo Injuns Bug Eye, wat went rong? You shoud never hav told them ther woud be plenty wisky as soon as they got religun. Wat kine of mishunary argyment do you cal that Bug Eye, I never herd the like. You mite hav noen it woud be ony too suxesful, an that evry last 1 of them woud imedjutly anser al rite I hav religun now ware is the wisky.

I do not spose they was sprised to find it was ony a goke on them Bug Eye, but neether shoud you be serprised if they tern around an play a few gokes on you now, like they seem to be doin frum yer leter. I feel I shoud warn you that these Soo is mor than likely to cary this thing too far. You may think they hav done so alredy, but I am perpared to tel you that they hav not even begun. Wen they reely get to thinkin up noo stunts to put you throo Bug Eye you wil not be ritin leters fer help. I hav noen them to pore cole oil on a fellers hare an set fire to it, that is ther idee of a comickle site. An the feller sed hisself that that was ony the beginin, an didunt giv any warnin of wat was cumin later.

Bug Eye sumtimes it seems to me I spend al my time getin you out of sum perdicment you hav werked yer way into. I wil tel you frankly Bug Eye I do not noe how you find so meny difrunt ways of getin in trubel, you are a jeenus I gess. Wel I wil cum an get you out this 1nst mor if you wil promus not to let it hapen agen.

Yr. Obeedint Servnt.
—HANK.

P S I hav borryed sum suplies off a sloon keeper on the strenth of yer sad story Bug Eye. He sed I do not beleeve it but any such good ly is werth grubstakin. I sed I wil not take the grub unless you beleeve my story. But he was a hard man Bug Eye, he woud not giv 1 inch, an I had to giv in an take the grub anyway. It was very hoomilyatin Bug Eye, an a good sample of wat I

hav to put up with with such a pardner.

I hav found a Soo buck that noes of you Bug Eye, but has not ben home sense the Soo declared war on you, an he has promused to take you this leter. Be perpared Bug Eye, I wil try to effeck yer rescue about the middel of the week.

—HANK.

P S S I am not very wel armed Bug Eye, but I wil werk it out sum way. I meen no insult to you Bug Eye wen I say that a wite man that cannot outsmart a Injun is not much of a wite man. We got this country frum the Injuns didunt we? We shore did.

—HANK.

Rite up the hill frum
ware you are at Bug Eye.

DEER Bug Eye,

Bug Eye I hav never in al my life see such a darn sitchashun as this heer is. I hav laid heer al last nite an al today thinkin an Im darn if I can think of a plan. I gess the best thing to do wil be to rite you this leter telin you egzackly wat the lay out is as seen frum my berds eyes posishun. I dont noe how I am goin to get this leter to you, but it is a sinch that I can not get it to you befour I hav rote it. So heer goes.

In the 1st plase, I am up the hill on the north side of the crick frum the Soo vilaje ware you are a prisoner Bug Eye. You wil say how in hel can he be on the side of that hill in broad daylite, ther is not enuf cover fer a skun jay berd. Wel Bug Eye you look up the hill tord the flat plattoe ware the Soo are grazin thare horses, an at the top of the hill you wil see a wite hors. He had not mooved fer more than 8teen hours, I gess he wil stay ther long enuf to serve the perpose now. You draw a line frum ware the wite horse is standin sleepin to ware the 3 Injun boys is sittin sleepin (a imajinery line I meen Bug Eye). In about the middle of that line you wil see a littel ruff plase about 6 foot long, made up of long grass an short brush. That is ware I am Bug Eye. That humpup in the grass neer 1 end is my gnees Bug Eye, I hav to dubbel them up so that both ends of me wil not stick out an be seen by the Injuns. I am sory that my gnees hav got to stik up, I noe it is a bad thing fer me an lible to be my undooin. But I cannot help it, I am makin them look jest as much like a rok as I can.

You wil say how cum Hank to get hisself in such a darn lay out as that. Wel Bug Eye I crep heer last nite jest befour dark, thats how I got heer. An wen dark cum the Soo mooved ther horses al up behind me, an left them ther too, with sum littel Injun boys to watch them nite an day. It is the 1st time I ever herd of Injuns wátchin thare horses at nite, mostly they are jest about as fool cairless as wite men Bug Eye. It makes me think that yer treetment of these Injuns has made them suspishus of sumthin. How meny times do I hav to tel you Bug Eye, you shoud ougt to remember that the Injuns is ony our red brothers. You wil be a hapier man wen you begin leevin the atchel handlin of Injuns to me. You are much too slow on the triger Bug Eye, an yer onfrendly atitoods does not go good with pore shootin.

At 1st I thout that ther was ony 2 Injun welps gardin the horses an I was goin to take 1 of them by the neck in eech hand an go find me a beter plase to save you frum. But they had garded agenst that, ther was 3 of them. An I see at 1nst that wile I was chokin 2 of them the other 1 woud be holerin his hed off, you noe how a Injun brat can holer Bug Eye he can be herd 40ty mile off, an I woud hav the hole Soo vilaje around my eers. I am not afrade of them Bug Eye but I was feerful that they woud qwitely gnock you on the hed in the confushun. I hav not cum al the way frum Cheese Cloth meerly to be disappointed, an find out at the last minit that you are a ded men.

So I hav laid heer ever sinse Bug Eye, getin hongrier al the time an trine to think of a plan. An if I don't think of a plan soon Bug Eye I am goin into acshun anyway, an mebby wip the entire tribe.

But it woud be much beter Bug Eye it seems like to me if wate a minit.

I started to say Bug Eye it seems to me it woud be beter if we woud go to werk an get wate a minit.

Bug Eye ther is a darn spider down the back of my neck, an he takes a big bite like a hot nale, ony itchier, an then crawls about 2 inches an takes anuther bite, an I hav tride skwirmin round on my back, an I hav tride pokin down with a stick, an I hav tride skwashin him with my hand, ony he is in the part of my back ware I cannot reech. Wate a minit. An he is getin werse al the time Bug Eye, an I dont dast stand up or taik off my shert, an if I skwerm too much them Injun welps wil see my gnees gerkin an wil noe they are not rok, an ther wil be hel to pay Bug Eye. I can not think or rite no mor Bug Eye owch wat the hel heer. My gosh how I suffer.

—HANK.

Pritty neer dark, saim plase.

DEER Bug Eye,

Hallyloogy Bug Eye I hav had a narrer escaip an it has cleered my mind. I hav thout of a plan. Wile I was fitin that darn spider 1 of them Injun welps see the grass wiggel, I gess he thout it was a chip munk or sumthin, an he upped with his bow an arrer an let fly, an the arrer cot me in the neck an stuck throo the skin, an hert most friteful. But it did not go into the holler part of my neck, an a darn good thing it is fer both of us. Wel the Injun welps begun jabberin, I do not noe wat they was sayin, I do not understand the Soo langwidge, but anyway I new they woud be cumin after ther arrer. I was hopin they woud be too lazy but that was my ony hope.

Shore enuff Bug Eye heer they cum, an I was getin reddy to give them the lesson of ther life an then brake an run fer it. Sudinly a skwaw let out sum kind of woop down in the circel of teepees an the 3 Injun welps broke an run fer the lodges. I gess it was a call to dinner Bug Eye, anyway the welp run home an left his arrer stickin in my neck. I hav pulled it out now an feel much better an madder, those varmints want to watch wat they are doin.

An now I noe how I wil get these leters to you Bug Eye. I wil speer them on the Injun welps arrer, an throe it out in plane site. An after he has got his walin fer not bringin his arrer home he wil cum out to look fer it an find it. An wen he sees this peese paper he wil run take it to his pa, an his pa wil run take it to a medisin man, an the medisin man wil see it is wite folks ritin an he wil run take it to you to find out wat it says. An you want to say, Wel it is a majic leter sined by 4 medisin bufloes an a cuppel of pole cats, an it says probly it is goin to rain. They shoud fal fer that 1, huh Bug Eye, an if they dont it maiks no difrunce, you hav reseeved my leters anyway, that is the mane idee. Now isunt that pritty smart Bug Eye.

Now I hav ben thinkin wat you beter do, an how you coud best signel me wat lodje you are in, so I can cum an save you. It is a sinch you can put out nuthin I can see becaus you are probly tied up, an if you let out a yell or make sum other noise I can heer, it wil probly be the deth of you, dont attempt nuthin foolish Bug Eye. That cuts out site an heerin, I gess we wil hav to go by smel. It is a tuff propizishun to track a man by smel in a plase ware ther is so meny diffrunt smels as ther is in a Injun vilaje, but heer is wat you do Bug Eye.

You keep werkin around until you get neer the fire. Then you pertend to be sleepin, an axidently rol in it an scorch yer wiskers. Be shore an scorch them good, ther must be no mistake. The Injuns wil be unsuspishus, they wil think nobudy woud be as big a fool as to do that on perpose, not even if they hav got to noe you pritty wel Bug Eye. An probly they wil spare yer life until I cum becaus you are such a comickle feller.

Cum about midnite I wil crawl down the hil an go creepin frum lodje to lodje ontil I find 1 that smels like scorch wiskers. Then I wil qwitely pul the teepee down on ther heds, an in the confooshun

I wil cut you loose an we wil escaip. Mebby. Anyway we wil try it. If we fale we can stil try an wip the entire tribe. An falin that, I am good an glad I hav leeded a verchus life Bug Eye, I ony wisht that you coud say the saim.

Get reddy Bug Eye.

Yr. Obeednt Servint,
—HANK.

Saim plase, later.

DEER Bug Eye,

Wel Bug Eye, yr. leters are watin fer you on that arrer I got out of my neck, but the Injun welp has not cum after it yet. I am not worin, they are probly stil walin him fer leevin his arer behind. Yes I think I heer him holerin down in the teepees. It sernly is a crime the way Injuns wale ther offspring. An I sernly hope they wil giv this 1 a walin he wil never ferget so long as he lives. Evry time he yels I say to myself, you woud shoot me in the neck with a arrer woud you, an then go off an leeve the arrer stickin in my neck. I gess you are sory now, leeve this be a lesson to you. Of corse he does not noe wat he reely done or wat he is bein waled fer, but it does me good to heer him yel jest the saim.

It looks like I got time to rite a few mor lines fer yet infermashun Bug Eye. Wen I see the Injun brat cumin after his arer I wil wad up wat I hav rote an throe it out beside the arrer an the other leters, so he wil find it an it wil get to you. I wil set down heer watever I see goin on own ther in the Soo vilaje ware you are at, an wenever anythin hapens that seems important I wil not ony put it down heer but I wil explane to you wat it meens.

I see ther is stil sum Injun brats watchin the horses. I wil hav to remane ware I am. I woud hav broke an run fer beter cover wen the last outfit run to dinner, but it was too daylite.

Ther is a Injun drum beetin down ware you are Bug Eye. Probly you can heer it, an are askin yerself wat does it al meen. It meens that ther is sum kind of deviltry afoot, an I feer it points to no good fer you Bug Eye. You had beter be hopin that they are not goin to hav sum form of entertanement. If they do, you are al too ap to be the sentral sorce of amoosement Bug Eye, I woud not want to be in yer shoos.

Now I see Injun bucks cumin out of the difrunt lodjes al drest up. They sernly look pecooler Bug Eye, any 1 woud think they was sum kind of wild men, they way they are got up. Thare goes 1 without a stitch on exsep a artyfishul tale about 6 foot long. Sumtimes he leeves it drag on the ground an sumtimes he carys it in his hand. He beter look out or he wil trip hisself up Bug Eye. He appeers to hav his fase paynted to repersent ham an eggs, he is a shockin site. I wil frankly admit I do not noe wat this meens.

Now al the Injun bucks hav gone inside a big teepee on the far side of the circel frum ware I am at. I gess I wil hav time fer a short nap.

No I wont eether Bug Eye, sumthin else is now goin on down thare ware you are at. A croud of skwaws is setin up a tal post in the middel of the circel of teepees. They are also bringin no end of firewood an kindlin. This probly meens they are goin to bild a big fire. Mebby they are goin to bern you in effigy Bug Eye. At leest I hope it wil be in effigy, tho I hav my very seerus douts.

Now 3 Injuns hav cum out of the mane teepee, ware they al went in a little wile ago. I do not noe how to describe wat they are doin Bug Eye. At 1st I thout they was dansin, then I thout they was fitin, now I think it is sum kind of reeligus seremony. 1 of them is ternin hansprings, I noe that much Bug Eye, but the rest of the pufformanse is a dark mistery. I woud not be serprised to lern that they hav ben drinkin.

Now they hav went back into the lodje Bug Eye.

4 Injuns has cum out of the lodje an stood on ther heds in a row like 1 man, then solumly went back in the teepee.

A Injun buck has flew out of the lodje as if he had help, he lit forked end up in a heap, then he got to his hands an gnees

an crole back into the lodje, a sobered an umbled man.

Gosh Bug Eye, a terrific howl has went up frum that darn teepee, you coud see the teepee shake, an the bufloe hide sides of the teepee swole out fer a minit like a bloon. I wil say freely I do not like the look of this Bug Eye. Jest 1 howl, in korus of about 60 male voices, then deep silence. Wat can it meen.

The skwaws that is bildin the fire does not seem to think it meens anythin, they are jest goin on about ther bizness like such goins on was a reglar thing. But dont take any false hopes frum that Bug Eye, a skwaw that does not mind her own bizness is wide open fer a wack on the side of the hed, an wel they noe it.

Now they hav got the fire lit, it is a woopin big 1 an makes everthin lite as day. But they hav not lit the fire they hav laid around the pole in the middel yet, I feer they are keepin that 1 fer sum onforchinut use.

Now all the Injun bucks are cumin out of that teepee. They hav cooked up sum deviltry Bug Eye or I am a lyer. 1 Injun is bad enuff an 2 is werse, but you get a bunch like that together an wat 1 dont think of anuther 1 does, it takes a man of grate fisikul endurance to upt up with them at al.

They are stil filin out of that teepee Bug Eye in a long endless line. My gosh how did they al get in ther, I didunt think it woud hold them al.

They are stil cumin Bug Eye, I never see the beet of it, they must hav ben in that teepee 5 deep. It is a wunder they woud not smuther, wat coud be ther perpose.

Good gosh Bug Eye wat the hel heer, they are stil cumin, I bet they was 1000 Injun bucks in that teepee, I can hardly beleeve my own eyes. Sumtimes I think ther must hav ben a hooge pit dug under that teepee, an the Injuns stacked therselfs in it like cordwood. Eether that or ther must hav ben a secrut tunnel leedin into it frum sum outside suply of Injuns that we did not suspeck. Ther is sernly sumthin rong heer.

They are al out at last Bug Eye, it is a good thing, I could not hav stood much mor.

Nossir, heer cums 2 more. That is the last straw, Bug Eye, I giv it up. These last 2 seems to be trine to pul sumthin out of the lodje after them, I cannot see wat it is yet. O, it is a Injun with hooge boots on, they are struglin to pul him out feet 1st. I wil bet he was the Injun on the bottom Bug Eye, an he has faynted frum the grate presher frum above. This has no speshul meenin so far as you are conserned Bug Eye, it is ony the natchel result of such goins on, they shoud hav noen that they coud not get that many Injuns in 1 tent without it bein fatal to sum.

Wel they hav got him drug out at last, an they are al standin aroun wile about 4 of them asist him to his feet. It looks like—

WEL WAT THE—

Betern ½ way back to Cheese Cloth,
Day after the grate Battel.

DEER Bug Eye,

Wel Bug Eye you hav done it now. I dont noe ware you are or how you got thare, or whether you are alive or ded, but 1 thing is sertin, an that is that you hav spilled the beens this time. I woud jest as soon be ded as be pardner to such a exsentrick feller, an if ever I get you out of this fix I am goin strate back to Singletree Indianna an leeve you to yer fate.

Wel Bug Eye after I see al them Injuns cum pilin out of that teepee they drug sumthin out after them, an I see it was a hoomin form. An they got saim to his feet, an he rared up to his full hite, an I see it was you Bug Eye. I coud not see yer fase at that distunce, but I new the Injuns were al littel short fellers, 6 foot an under, an wen I see you towerin above them I sed thare is my pore pardner.

But pitcher my serprise Bug Eye. Tel me 1 thing Bug Eye, how cum you to let them Injuns, wich is littel beter than heethen savijes, how cum you to let them get you in such a disgustin condishun?

Wy was you warin 4, 5 bufloe horns on yer hed? Wy was yer wiskers shaved off pritty neer up to the top of yer been? Wat was you doin with fethers in yer nose Bug Eye, an wy did you hav a smal base drum in 1 hand an a blowed up pig skin in the other? Above al Bug Eye, wy was you appeerin rite out thare in the open practicly stark nakid, with almost no cloes on, an them you had on a skandel an a disgrase Bug Eye? Alas Bug Eye I seen al too cleer that you was under the infloonce of likker.

An the way you was carrin on Bug Eye. I coud hardly beleeve my own eyes. Leepin in the air an crackin yer heels. Holerin bluddy merder. At 1st I thout they must hav put a hot skilit down the back of yer shert, an I woud hav ben ony too glad to hav thout so Bug Eye, ony I saw that you did not hav any shert on, or pants neether. An heer you went cavortin an makin a fool of yerself, an the Injuns folerin along behind to see wat you woud do next.

I was shocked an paned Bug Eye, I giv you my werd fer it. Even them pore ignernt savijes was shocked, not 1 of them was laffin, they was meerly starin in dum amazement. Littel do I blame them, I hav never see such a revoltin exybishun.

An al the time Bug Eye I was hororfied to notis that you was getin closer an closer to that tall pole with the kindlin bilt up around it, perfeckly onconshus of yer aprochin misforchin. An I see them Injuns was closin round in a circel, getin reddy to land as soon as you showed sines of tuckerin out. It woud hav served you rite if I had let maters take ther natchel corse Bug Eye, but I coud not bring myself to do that. I sed, I wil save Bug Eye this 1nst mor, if I hav to wip the entire Soo nashun.

I roled up my sleeves Bug Eye an heer I cum. The 1st thing I done was stampede the Soo horses, with yels an roks an 1 thing another, an the Injun brats that was watchin the horses or pertendin to, they yelled fit to die an went dashin down into the vilaje.

That broke up the Injun party Bug Eye, an ther was wild confooshin. They was moilin round down thare lookin fer the weepins an trine to get orginized, an meentime I run around the hole valley in grate leeps, an no sooner had I got around to the far side of the vilaje than thare they went, chargin up the hill tords the plase I had stampeded the horses frum, sum afoot, sum ahorseback.

I wated ontil most of them was out, then heer *I* cum, chargin into the vilaje, an ther I seen you leenin agenst that pole they was goin to bern you on probly, pickin yer teeth with yer legs crossed, as cam an cool as if you was 1000 miles away an nuthin hapenin. I yelt Hay Bug Eye run fer yet life, an I gess you understanded me, away you went. I did not reelize you woud take me so seerus, I took out after you but you was ganin evry jump, an I yelt Hay wate wate ware are you goin an you paid no atenshun, an soon you was lost in the brush.

I went back an stole a horse out of a teepee, it is a good runnin horse like the Injuns lets sleep with the famly, we are that much ahed anyway, but yer trale was lost. An heer I hav been serchin ever sinse.

Yr. Obeedint Servint,
—HANK.

P S Hallyloogy Bug Eye, I hav lerned indereckly frum a peeseful Injun that it is al a mistake. The feller I seen makin a munky out of hisself was the reglar Injun medisin man, not my pore foolish pardner as I was led to spose. I also lerned that you escaiped with yer life Bug Eye befour I got thare even. I can almost fergiv you fer the troubbel you have caused me Bug Eye, I feel you hav ben punished enuff fer yer eevil ways. Let this be a lesson to you Bug Eye. It is my outstandin hope that wen I see you agen I wil find you a changed man, an 1 whoo is trine to make up fer yer past mistakes by leedin a beter life.

Yr. Obeedint Servant,
—HANK.

The LITTLE THINGS

A Story of Heroism on a Hoodooed Ship

By NORMAN R. RAINE

WHEN the *S. S. Bokhara* stopped in midocean for the eighth time in three days it pushed a notch higher, a perceptible distance closer to breaking point, the nervous tension of her crew. The Old Man, looking like a parson in black wideawake hat and pongee coat, carefully laid his paint brush on the gunwale of the quarterboat and stood at the head of the lower bridge ladder, waiting. When the chief appeared, stumping thick legged over the alleyway door coaming, and buttoning his jacket on his way below, the Old Man hailed him in testy query.

"It's that damned corroded circulating pump casting again," the chief replied. "I tried shoring with a wedge, and a bit of soft rubber in the hole, but the shoring keeps working adrift."

His tone was on edge. Purposely, he omitted the customary "sir". The Old Man noticed and resented this. But he said nothing further; more effective, he clucked, with his tongue, disapproving sounds that quite definitely—and unjustly—placed the blame upon the chief's dumpy shoulders.

It did not matter that the day was still, the sea a deep calm immensity, the weather settled. That did not matter in the least. What did matter was that the

Bokhara, fifty-four days eastbound, Bombay for Panama, hung suspended, rolling idly on a blue mirror, an idle ship. For a windbag, the length of the voyage would have been nothing. For a steamer—even a disreputable tramp like the *Bokhara*—it was heartbreaking.

Before the vessel stopped, the *tap-tap* of chipping hammers in the hands of the crew, forward, amidship, aft, accompanied the rhythmic pounding of the crankshaft and the beat of the screw. When she glided to rest, all activity ceased. The hands left their work to gaze over the side. Only the doctor, rattling his pots in the galley, broke the profound stillness.

Flanagan, a great gaunt framed seaman with tired, monkeylike eyes and a pallor that no sun could efface, edged up to his working mate. He had a disconcerting trick of glancing over his shoulder before he spoke. He did it now.

"The ship's hoodooed, Belknap, that's wot," he murmured, and the pits darkened under his cheek bones. "Look at the breakdowns we've had. Held us back ten days at least. Steerin' chain breaks in the Red Sea; trouble wi' the feed pump valves day after day in the Indian Ocean; stopped I don't know how many times for leaky boiler tubes; lost Snuffley Wheeler off Java—"

"Tuberculosis. Got it ashore," Belknap discounted curtly.

"I know. Don't make no difference. You're a landsman and a scholar. You don't understand these things. But he died on the ship, didn't he? Yes—well—then *this* racket. If they wos engineers instead o' ruddy tinsmiths . . ."

His mournful voice droned on in irritating monotone.

"It's uncanny, that's wot. I mind a time I sailed out o' Paramaribo in a Dutch bark. The mate went off his bun one night, an' murd—"

"You're a bloomin' liar, Flanagan! You an' yer bloody minded yarns. You never seen Paramaribo," another man interrupted cynically. "If it was the death cell you sailed out of, now—" He laughed shortly. "Shouldn't talk in your sleep, mate. It's a bad 'abit. We gets to learn things."

Flanagan wheeled around on him. His slack lips moved without sound, but his eyes were terrible.

Belknap moved away from the threatened quarrel. A sense of futility, growing with every maddening delay, swept down upon him. He longed to shout, "Shut up! Shut up!"—to beat them to silence, to still for awhile that everlasting pettifogging clack of his shipmates' tongues; to be for one day alone, away from these vulgar men of an inferior caste, with whom he had been cooped in sickening juxtaposition for ten weary months.

If he were only an officer, now, but no; even amidship their sluggish progress and succession of tiny retarding mishaps had raised a barrier of irascibility between deck officers and engineers; had poisoned what habitually was good humored raillery and joking abuse. Now, he heard them at night in the saloon alleyway, on his way to lookout on the forecastle head. Pugnacious comment and acrimonious reply. Sometimes almost blows. The whole ship was tainted with it.

FLANAGAN and Sharpo still were quarreling, when the boatswain, bowlegged and long of arm, his face beaten a hard red by the suns and winds of all the oceans, waddled out of the shadows of the fore peak. He roared:

"Come on, you longshore sojers! Think you can work Tom Cox's traverse every time the old bucket squats? Lay to it, now!"

An amiable enough man in normal times, he surged among them, bullying and pushing. They hung back sullenly, cursing him under their breaths. He shoved Belknap violently. The next moment he was sitting on the deck, holding his jaw while the man he had hustled straddled him with thin legs, shrieking vituperation.

"You pot bellied walrus! Keep your dirty hands off me, d'you hear? You touch me again and I'll knock your bloody lights out!"

The boatswain slowly regained his feet, eyes gleaming redly.

"*You*'ll knock *my*—"

He did not finish but, advancing, smashed the student with right and left against a winch. He slipped to the deck and lay there, elbow guarding his head against further punishment. The boatswain glared at him for an undecided moment or two, then walked aft.

"Knock my lights out, will he, the narrow gutted little swab. I'll l'arn him!" The renewed clatter of the chipping hammers failed to give him solace.

AT TWO bells the *Bokhara* was under way again. Belknap, his face bearing marks of the boatswain's hands, staggered aft from the galley, laden with the forecastle's evening meal. He was sick for home, and the smell of the greasy food quickened his nostralgia so that his bruised lips trembled in spite of himself. The sea, in its burnished copper smoothness, seemed to mock the turmoil of his spirit. He entered the evil smelling forecastle and dumped his load on the table, spread with graniteware cups and plates and rude cutlery.

"That's right, Peggy—spill 'arf the tea. We get so much of it," some one growled with elaborate sarcasm. Belknap took his place amid disgusted comment.

"Scouse again! God blimey! And prunes—and look at this lousy stuff!"

Beers, a tousled A.B., with dirty shirt open to his hairy chest and big sweating stomach, grabbed a piece of bread from the barge and broke it, exposing the brown discoloration of weevils. He flung it down, seized another, broke and discarded that. Flanagan knocked his hands away as he reached again.

"Jeez—we ain't no ladies' maids, but for God's sake scrub your filthy paws afore ye handles the grub, mate," he said.

Beers turned on him, snarling, and a fight seemed imminent; but Most, a phlegmatic squarehead of herculean frame, interposed.

"Shtop it!" he growled. "If you vos in a windchammer you vould half someding to kick about. And you better make the best of it. Dere's no more fresh meat, and diss is the last of the bread. I heard the steward tell the mate. You gets Liverpool pantiles und pickled mule from now on—und maype you'll learn vot veevils is!" His shaggy head nodded portentously.

The meal proceeded amid continual bickering, and grousing at the rancid margerine, the flyclotted jam, the cockroaches that swarmed the place, sharing meals and their beds, the rats that squeaked about the bunks at night. It was a relief when they were done, and scattered out on deck for an evening smoke.

Belknap washed the dishes and piled them in the rack. There was no hot water, and grease lay in a thick rim around the pan. Automatically he wiped it with a piece of old newspaper which, it developed immediately, belonged to a shipmate who had not—so he said—read it. Another argument, in which Belknap retaliated in the language of his opponent. They were dragging him down. The atmosphere of the place was sulphuric. Afterward he lay on his lumpy, straw filled paillasse, brooding dumbly, until the snoring of a sailor drove him out on deck. Would this voyage never end?

DARK fell and bright stars flowed across a luminous sky. The *Bokhara*, in a setting of rippling phosphorus, dipped and rolled to the deep breathing of the sea, and the masthead light painted a faint patch of yellow on the spar as it wove ceaselessly across the stupendous bowl of the night. Far down in the stokehold the importunate bang of a fireman's shovel against a bunker bulkhead signaled the trimmer for more coal.

Belknap looked forward. The man on standby, making tea and toast for the third mate, was a jumping shadow in the door of the lighted galley. The third mate, a black shape on the wing of the bridge, leaned motionlessly his elbows on the rail, his thoughts halfway across the world. A plume of smoke poured from

the tall funnel, making a broad smudge astern, then jetted white to the roar of escaping steam. The chief's voice shouted down the engine room grating.

"You silly fool! What the hell are you blowing off for?"

The depths responded faintly.

"What say? Can't hear you—"

After a time the roar ceased abruptly and the sudden hush made articulate the gentle swish of sea water running along the rusty plates. Queer dot, a ship, with its freight of puny hopes and hates and ambitions, crawling about the wet skin of a planet!

Four bells chimed on the bridge, was echoed on the forecastle head, and Belknap went forward to relieve the lookout. Flanagan, his broad angular frame stretched against the sky, started at his approach, then glanced nervously over his shoulder.

"Gar! You startled me, mate," he whispered. "Say—d'ye notice anything near that starboard hawse pipe there?"

Belknap did not trouble to conceal his contempt.

"Imagining things again?" he grunted.

"No, but—" the man's fear was real—"sometimes I imagine the ghost o' me murderer creeping up over the bows."

He lingered, as if glad of company, in the face of Belknap's impatient nonsympathy.

"That Sharpo—he didn't mention me to you, eh?" he resumed, softly. "Didn't say nothing about sleep talkin' or the like o' that, per'aps? No? Well, I'll be gettin' aft now."

He peered down into the gloom of the forward well deck.

"Ought to have lights along here," he whined. "Man c'd break his leg ag'in them steam pipes. Too dark, that's wot it is. Man never knows what he might meet in the dark."

His heavy feet clanged down the ladder.

When he was gone Belknap pondered.

"I suppose I should tip Sharpo off to leave him alone." An inarticulate wave of sympathy laved him as he thought of Flanagan and his shadows. "Poor devil," he thought, but a swift change of mood caused his throat to swell. Resentment burned anew. "Why should I butt in?" he growled. "Let them murder each other if they like. There's got to be something to break the spell."

A tiny puff of wind fanned his cheek, then died away. Lookout on such a night at sea was a perfunctory job, and he leaned against the windlass, trying to reconcile his experience with the anticipations of ten months ago, losing himself in thought. Disillusionment had come with disconcerting swiftness. It began the first night at sea with a drunken fight in the forecastle and revealed to a mind jaundiced with seasickness the guttersnipe characteristics of his mates.

It was deepened by daily contact with them; their obscenities, their filthy personal habits, their degrading quarrels over the whacks of greasy, unpalatable food, their swinelike feeding. The *Bokhara* was an old vessel, parsimoniously owned and illfound, and the grousing that began on sailing day became perpetual.

BELKNAP'S first glimpse of the Lands of Romance, Port Said, and a big City liner, blazing in the African sunlight, with pink *saronged* lascars on her decks, surging past them in the Bitter Lakes, lent only a transitory thrill that later was swallowed up amid the longshore filth of Arabian coast ports and the disreputable shore adventures of his mates. Shore leave to them meant only a chance to get drunk, to lie in stewing native dens, and later to brag in foulest terms of their unsavory conquests. The rough foremast jokes that sounded so comical when the voyage began had staled with repetition until they became unbearable.

It was then that the personal little habits and peculiarities of his shipmates began to get under his skin—such petty things, things that ashore would not be noticed, or would be passed off with a laugh; the impinging of one unnaturally tender ego against another; tiny inconsequences, how they galled and festered!

How large they loomed, now, in the long, hot delaying days and bickering nights!

There was Empey, for instance—a mean, nasty little sweep. A sneak thief, with the soul of a rat. Flanagan the haunted, with his gruesome yarns that went endlessly on, whether one listened or not. Beers, unwashed, beastly, with a tongue that smutted and besmirched everything it touched upon. Sharpo, the malingering half baked cynic and his eternal "bloomin' liar". Most, the squarehead, an old seaman, with his aloof contempt for the forecastle and all it contained, including Belknap.

Snuffley Wheeler, the consumptive, whose harsh cough through the long hot night hours had cheated the watch below of sleep and brought upon his head the searing blasphemy of his mates. He would have starved in his bunk, Belknap believed, had it not been for the grudging ministrations of Most and himself. Death mercifully had claimed him off the coast of Java, and the forecastle deemed him good riddance.

Were these waterfront scum the progeny of the old sea breed? Perhaps, though, the old sailing ship men were different, for their job required courage, whereas these men were day laborers in steam, the sum of their nautical knowledge a mediocre handling of a chipping hammer and a paint brush—and they were cowards. They welshed in their quarreling as frankly as children, and when they did fight they brought into action every foul tactic of the slums. Seadogs, these? Were they the props upon which rested the centuries old traditions of the sea?

Belknap must have dozed.

A voice that bellowed from the bridge blasted him out of it, his wits adrift.

"Lookout ahoy! What the hell are you doing up there? Why don't you sound the bell and report the lights?"

The bell? The lights? Mechanically he reached for the clapper lanyard and pulled—two double taps and a single.

"Lights are bright," he bawled resentfully.

The action focused his thoughts and brought his attention to his job. Sweeping the horizon, his eyes traveled the dim line of sky and sea, then, intuitively it seemed, shot back to a point almost dead ahead. There was a tiny red glow. He waited to make sure, then again addressed the bridge.

"*Light ho-ho!*"

The watch officer leaned alertly forward.

"Can you make it out?"

There was a pause.

"Looks like a vessel's port light, sir."

"All right."

The third mate leveled his night glasses, and Belknap's eyes returned to the horizon. A passing ship always is of interest at sea. In the desolate reaches of the South Pacific it becomes almost an event. This was the first the *Bokhara* had seen in eighteen days.

AGAIN a faint wind stirred, and the lookout became conscious that the still, warm, sea night carried on its gentle breath an impalpable threat. He felt suddenly depressed; a lowering of the spirits beyond anything he had ever experienced.

The bridge hailed him again.

"See anything out of the ordinary about that light, lookout?"

He stared ahead. Stars, black water flowing under the bows; he was uncertain.

"Seems a bit large, sir," he ventured.

Again—

"All right!"

Presently the chartroom was flooded with light and the Old Man in his pajamas stepped out on to the bridge. The chief engineer's door slammed. Running feet clanged in the alleyway. A minute later the chief and the mate appeared on the bridge beside the Old Man.

Ahead, the ruby spark of the stranger's light had grown, had acquired a nimbus of faint pink that alternately deepened and waned. As Belknap turned, his nostrils caught and identified the cause of his vague disquiet, and his heart contracted with quick terror.

"Oh, Christ above!" he prayed, for over the dark sea that blood red glare was the light of a burning ship.

THE GROUP on the bridge dissolved, and cabin lights sprang up. The half naked crew poured out of their forecastles to stare out over the side.

The Old Man's eyes were blue ice as he spoke to the chief.

"Get another knot on her, Mr. Chappelow, if you have to blow her apart," he said quietly.

The chief's fat shoulders took on a dignity strange to them as he trotted below. But his black gang needed no driving word. Smoke poured in a troubled flood from the funnel crown, and the thin shell of the *Bokhara* shook with ague under the wild pound of the laboring engines.

The chief, babbling long forgotten supplications that nothing vital would fetch away before they were within range, padded unceasingly from stokehold to engine room, through the tunnel and back again, feeling bearings, eying gauges, speaking a word of commendation here and there, showing a new side to his sweating men. Thirty years at sea means something, and the chief was a simple soul. The deep unspoken brotherhood of seafaring men was calling, calling—and his heart was on the blazing ship.

Sharpo and Beers joined Belknap on the forecastle head, but the third mate was a reasonable youth and did not notice. Beers' dirty bare feet tapped impatiently on the steel deck plates. His huge soft body shook in sympathy with the tremor of the driving vessel, and he patted the windlass as one would caress the neck of a straining horse.

"Good old gal," he murmured, "you'll do it yet. Pore souls! The chief ain't 'arf pushin' 'er, eh?"

The boatswain appeared, fastening his trousers.

"Lay aft, lads," he said, gruffness overlying his anxiety. "There'll be work for us afore long, or I'm a goney."

He stood, bracing his strong corded legs against the roll of the deck; and square, sturdy bulk, with deep chest under a thin singlet, lent courage to the quaking lookout. Incongruously, he recollected that the boatswain had an anchor tattooed on the back of one gnarled fist. It comforted him.

The smoke was definite now, and a bit acrid. It cast a haze over the water. A half hour passed, and gradually, upon the black canvas of the night was painted the blazing pyramid of a full rigged ship. The lurid glare of the flames stained with scarlet the belching spirals of the thick smoke pillar that rolled straight up, stabbed now and then by a spouting geyser of fire. The crackling of the flames was plainly audible, punctuated by heavy explosions, and the burning canvas, breaking away from the yards, did a death dance in the rigging before being sucked skyward in the upward draft.

Awful and majestic destruction, in the midst of the hushed and waiting sea, and Belknap thrilled as the *Bokhara* swung in a wide curve, her racing crankshaft almost rocking the engines off their bed plates, her wake a simitar of foam.

"SWING out the boats, Mister," the Old Man trumpeted, and the crew jumped to it. Bells jangled in the tramp's bowels, and she shivered to stillness. The Old Man stepped to the break of the lower bridge and addressed the crew, clustered about the fidley. "There are living souls aboard that craft, men," he said, "I needn't tell you more, eh?"

A husky fireman in grimy dungarees stepped forward.

"Wot about us, sir," he asked simply, indicating with a jerk of his head his mates of the black gang, gathered on the bunker hatch. "We could man one of the boats—an' we're used to a bit of 'eat," he ended with grim humor.

The Old Man nodded.

"Arrange that, Mister," he told the mate, and returned to the bridge, where he hailed the lookout and told him to report at the boats.

Belknap doubled aft.

At the starboard boat, which had been lowered until it just cleared the water, a violent quarrel raged. Flanagan, his face murderous in the half light, faced Sharpo with doubled fists.

"I pulled an oar afore you could blow your nose prop'ly, you pup," he snarled, "an' I'm going in this boat."

"You're a bloomin' liar," Sharpo screamed back. "I'm a member of 'er crew, an' you can't crowd me out!"

The boatswain thrust between them.

"I'll bang your silly heads together, if you don't hold your jaw," he growled. "Get in the boat, the two o' you. You too, Belknap and Beers and Empey. Most, you'll go in the port boat with the black gang and the second mate. Come on, men! Look alive! This ain't Hyde Park!"

The mate appeared with a first aid kit, jumped for the after falls and slid down. The heavy whaleboat was lowered away, her crew dropped in, and she cast off.

"Out oars—give way!"

Under the impetus of willing arms she fairly leaped from the *Bokhara's* rusty side. A minute later the other boat fell in astern. Belknap was bowman and, seizing his boathook, he faced the wreck. She was alight from stem to counter, but the full bodied violence of it seemed concentrated amidship. Evidently, when she caught she had been lying becalmed with everything but skysails set, for as he watched the remnants of her main royal went, in a soaring comet's tail of fire.

As the whaleboats raced over the flat sea the heat became terrific, and the mate ordered way enough as he sought for a windward approach. They glided to rest, and the crews doused sea water over their clothing, then turned to watch, under a golden snow of blazing fragments that they beat out with their hands. Every rope and burning spar was reflected on the glassy surface of the sea. There was not a breath of wind, but the heart of the furnace roared in a deep menacing undertone like the voice of a ravening beast.

In quick succession three deafening explosions sent geysers of amber sparks to add their transient glory to the starry sky. The sea about the boats hissed under a shrapnel of dropping embers. Another detonation and another. The foremast, a colossal torch that awed them with its incandescent grandeur, tottered crazily, then went over the side with a crash that seemed to lift the boats out of the water.

Shielding his eyes, the mate jumped to his feet, again seeking an opening. There was none. He leaned forward, shouting to make himself heard above the thunder of the flames.

"It's a boarding job, men. There are no soft spots. She's loaded with case oil and petrol, I judge, and she's apt to go up altogether any minute. But there is somebody alive on her poop so—*ready now!*—give way together—put your backs into it!"

The stout oars bent, there was a moment of shriveling menace, and the mate's boat shot into comparative cover under the overhang of the stern. Terror pulled at Belknap's self control. Another terrific explosion racked the doomed vessel and he lost his nerve.

"We can't do it—we can't get aboard there—we'll all be killed!" he wailed. "Let's go back before it's too late!"

Empey, the Whitechapel sneak thief, turned on his thwart and punched at him savagely.

"Shut your trap and get that boathook out," he snapped. "Here! Give it me!"

He snatched it up and hooked it to the rudder post. Smoke bellied around them, suffocating, half blinding. Empey thrust the boathook into Belknap's flaccid hands.

"How! 'Ang on to this. If you let go, I'll ruddy well kill you!" he promised venomously.

BELKNAP saw them rise from their seats in a crimson haze, fantastic as shadows in a nightmare, huge, then tiny in the flaring light. Like a cat, Flanagan sprang for the rudder chains, reached out to grasp an overhanging length of line, chanced his weight on it and went up, hand over hand, followed by the mate, Sharpo and the rest. They crossed the

taffrail and were lost to sight. The second mate's boat bumped alongside, and her crew followed suit.

Coughing, retching, in clouds of heavy smoke shot through with firebrands and gobs of burning oil, Belknap, in mortal funk, crouched in the bow of the boat, flinching at every sound. Danger had rammed home the fact that he was a coward—a poltroon without shame. He was frantic with desire to cast loose and pull away from the floating holocaust that at any moment might split into frightful oblivion.

At intervals faint shouts came through the pandemonium, and the hurricane roar of the flames sounded a new and more solemn note. Explosions racked the ship as if she were under shell fire, and after each one the air was filled with flying gouts of flame. The woodwork of the whaleboat became too hot to touch; the paint blistered and bubbled. Rubbing one hand with the other ash dry palm he discovered that the hair on the back was singed and crisp. His bowels knotted in the terrific heat, and he panted hoarsely, swollen tongue trying vainly to moisten his cracking lips. What of his mates on the burning ship?

Physical distress boosted his fear to panic. To hell with the rest of them. They were doomed, anyway. No man could survive that volcano, and why should he be sacrificed to a foolish tradition that a man must stick by his mates?

He stood up, boathook poised, ready to push away, when through the ruddy murk above, Flanagan's face, horribly seared and blackened, shorn of brows and lashes and his eyes blood red slits, projected itself over the side.

"Quick!" he croaked. "Shove the boat around to the break of the poop. We can't reach her here. She's too far under the stern. Move, man, for God's sake!"

Gripped by that stronger will, Belknap pulled clumsily around, fumbling with his boathook for holds on the vessel's high quarter. As he rounded the stern and left the shelter of the overhand he was met full in the face by a blast of hell, but he persevered, Flanagan keeping pace with him along the poop and down the ladder to the main deck. Fire forced him back to the poop. Across his wide shoulders was the charred and smoking body of a man. He swayed, went to his knees, then lowered his burden over the side to the boat. "He's alive," he told Belknap. "Douse him with water."

Flanagan disappeared, but in his place came the mate, similarly laden, then Beers, then Sharpo, in quick succession. Again and again they came, queer, misshapen silhouettes in the scarlet light, bringing their limp cargoes across the deck and lowering away.

A broad tongue of fire shot across the poop, lighting the scene with sanguinary brilliance, and a warning shout went up. The mizzenmast, the last to ignite, and flaunting here and there a rag of blazing canvas, tottered, held, swayed, flamed up until sea and sky rang with its clamorous voice, then swung drunkenly, held by a single stay of wire rope. Its fall was a matter of seconds. The mate, a berserk demigod, with clothes afire, sent his deep sea bellow through the tumult.

"Back to the boats, men!" he roared.

They came, some at a shambling run, others dragging themselves painfully across the planks. They jumped for the boats, splashing in the sea all about, with hardly sufficient strength to cling to the gunwales until Belknap could drag them aboard. They lay then, on the boat bottom, across the thwarts, over the still bodies of the men they had saved, in tumbled heaps, too weary to grasp the oars, and weeping in the agony of their burns.

THE MATE was the last to leave. Deliberately he looked about before he jumped, then landed in the stern sheets.

"Come on, lads," he urged. "Break out the oars. She's going up any second now!"

Suddenly he jerked to his feet, tiller

held slack in his hands and counted.

"Here," he yelled. "There's two of our men missing!"

"Empey's gone, sir," one man said dully. "Fell into the 'old, 'e did."

"Who is the other, then?"

The exhausted men roused themselves, looking about with haggard, watery eyes.

"Where's Sharpo?" some one asked.

"Sharpo! *Shar-r-po*— The mate's voice rose to a harsh scream.

A shapeless moaning huddle in the bows raised itself. It was Flanagan, almost unrecognizable. His lips writhed in the glare. His face literally was cooked. He surged to his feet, gazed dazedly about him; then, as if shot from a bow, he launched his gaunt body over the rail of the burning ship. He poised, outlined for a second against the spouting mouth of the inferno, then disappeared in a curtain of smoke.

"He can't make it! That mizzen— Come back, you ruddy fool!" the mate wailed.

His words were drowned in a terrific explosion. The boat rocked with the concussion.

"We've got to leave them! We've got to push off! Out oars!" The mate was crying openly.

In every man is a latent spark that can light him to undreamed of heights. Something snapped in Belknap's brain.

"Wait!" he yelled. "*Wait!*"

His soul rose triumphant above its poor clay. They were his mates, those men— Flanagan and Sharpo and poor thieving little Empey and those others whose grimy feet he was not fit to lick. They had risked all, suffered all, while he had clung like a limpet to the safety of the boat. They were his shipmates, a word whose meaning was beyond a landsman's ken; and, although his belly trembled with dread, shame and a fierce jealous yearning to prove himself one of them lashed him on.

How he gained the deck of the sailing ship he never knew. In a trice he lost his brows, his lashes, his hair. His eyeballs were seared. The doomed vessel quivered under his feet. Half crippled, wholly reckless, he plunged forward.

"Sharpo! Sharpo—Flanagan!"

He tried to shout, but his voice was a whisper.

"Flanagan!"

A crimson mist enveloped him, but he staggered on, trying to find the house. Fire licked about him and the cruel gases bit deep into his throat. Vision dimmed, but he battled with unconsciousness, arms waving in the smoke like the antennae of a dying beetle. The shock of an explosion threw him to his knees. He swayed, making a last supreme effort to shout.

"*Flanagan!*"

Dimly his ears caught an answering hail, and out of the mad swirl of smoke and flame and strangling gases reeled a towering figure, supporting across his back the delirious blackened wreck that was Sharpo.

Belknap rocked to his feet, fear burned away; he lurched forward, striving to share the burden.

"All right, shipmate," Flanagan cawed. "I can handle him. You grab me shirt and lead the way to the boat. Me eyes is burned out. I think I'm blind."

BELKNAP, in his bunk, rolled gingerly on his side, lips wry with pain. With bandaged hands he felt his face, his head. Bandaged too; great swathes of cotton, yellow tinged with healing ointment. Dully his ears caught the drone of voices around the forecastle table. A strange accent—that would be one of the men they had saved—was telling for the hundredth time the story of the loss of the *Albatross*. Belknap caught fragments.

". . . .case oil, she was loaded with . . . New York for Batavia . . .eleven of us left, thanks to you fellows . . .your own poor guys . . . "

Beers' voice interrupted, weeded with oaths.

"Aye—Most's gone. There was a—man for you. Burned to a crisp, 'e was, afore he give up; an' a fireman, but 'e was drowned jumpin' for 'is boat; an' Empey

—pore little swine! Tough on old Flanagan, 'im wots afraid o' the dark, too. But there's a chance, they say. There's an Australian liner comin' up to take 'im off."

From across the forecastle a feeble voice from one of the bunks made itself heard.

"Lucky for me Belknap followed me aboard. If it hadn't been for his shout you'd be sayin', 'Pore Flanagan, he was a nice young feller! Didn't think he had it in him. But he had guts—plenty. We was gettin' damn' well fed up wi' his dainty ways, too, like the forecastle wasn't good enough for him. Somebody'd have give him a hidin' before long. Well, you never can tell about a man, and we'd never have known if Sharpo hadn't played the silly ass and gone looking for booze in the cabin."

The forecastle shook with laughter that ceased abruptly as the throb of the *Bokhara's* screw ceased. They listened.

"'Ello," the speaker resumed, "the blinkin' old cripple's stopped again!"

A minute passed. The vessel shook, and again the beat of the screw took up its steady work. From another bunk came a different voice, weak and languid, a shade more hollow, if possible, than the last.

"You're a bloomin' liar, Flanagan," it said. "She ain't!"

SHOCK TROOPS

By *Leonard* H. N*ason*

IT WAS a frequent occurrence during the operations of the A. E. F. to hear some regiment or division announce that they were shock troops. There was no division that had had twenty-four hours of front line service that did not lay claim to the title, except perhaps certain regular divisions that had had all the shock taken out of them during the fighting of early summer. As a matter of fact, there were no shock troops in the A. E. F.

The European armies were recruited in a different manner from the American. The German and French, in particular, took the entire male population of the nation from the age of nineteen to fifty or so. Moreover, certain districts in both countries turn out men with better physique than others.

In nations that employ the universal system of military training the best blood of the country, the flower of its youth, is already under arms at the outbreak of hostilities, and is the first to fall during that period in all wars when there is a great deal of galloping, charging, cheering, and dying heroic deaths. It takes about six months of a war to convince the participants that no good comes of reckless bravery.

A period comes then when most of the units are composed of older men, returned wounded and those who have been in the war long enough to be very cautious of attacking anything that looks difficult. It becomes imperative to have certain units which can be depended upon to carry through an attack, and for this reason special regiments are formed, specially trained, specially fed, specially uniformed, and used only as the spearhead of attacks, or to stop a particularly dangerous assault. These regiments are formed of the few remaining young men of a nation wasted by years of war.

The Americans, during the short time they were in the war, suffered no deterioration of physique, morale or quality of replacements. The American Army therefore had no necessity to form special units of shock troops. The average American division, run of the pen, was as good as any shock unit of Europe and a lot better than most of them. But then, the Americans had not been fighting for four years.

If you can't chuckle at this one—see a doctor!

JAMES STEVENS

author of "Paul Bunyan" *offers*

POWDER RIVER

From the Memoirs of Corporal Mattock, —th Infantry Training Regiment, A. E. F.

"WHAT'S the greatest river in the world?"

"Powder River!"

"She's a mile wide and a foot deep!"

"Some river-r-r!"

I just stood and stared at the Montana drafted men as the big one they called Missoula Red bellowed out the question and the brag about the Montana river they were all so proud of, and the others answered him back.

For six days, ever since the replacement draft come from Saguenay, they had been bawling and yelling that way whenever Sergeant Funke would give them a rest in the bayonet period. It was pesky hot August weather, and us corporals was satisfied to just stand and take a blow whenever "Rest" was commanded; but these rambunctious Montana men hadn't drilled enough yet to make it seem like work, and they were always rearing to go.

"I'm a lone wolf from the Bitter Root and it's my time to howl!" bellowed Missoula Red now.

A gangling, bowlegged, stoop shouldered, Indian looking soldier in the open rank opposite let out a "Wow-w-o-o-oo!" at that.

Missoula Red "Wow-w-o-o-ooed!"

back at him, and blamed if they didn't jump at one another, lunging with their scabbarded bayonets; and they kicked up a fog of dust in what looked like a regular fight, as they rammed, slammed and guarded, the scabbards banging and grinding together.

"Hey, yousè guys!" yelled Sergeant Funke. "Back to the ranks with you."

"Ain't they hell raisers, though?" said Corporal Widdy to me, from our place back in the file closers.

"They are, for a fact," I said, "and I can't figger out why Johnny Hard don't set on 'em."

"Boy, that's his meat."

"Well, Wid, you know I'm strong for that rough stuff, too. But it makes it hard for us instructors to give 'em the real science."

And it did, too. The Montana men would get so wild in all the pointing, disarming and hand to hand fighting exercises that it was almost impossible to demonstrate to them the scientific motions and holts; and the corporal instructors had to continually warn them or they would have turned all the drill into what was the same as regular fighting and rasseling.

OUR SERGEANT, Funke, had to pick on me, of course, about twice to every other bayonet corporal's once for making demonstrations. Because we were bitter rivals about Odile, and he had played me a couple of dirty tricks by winning a flock of francs from me in the payday crap game, and then buying her a dress. He was contemptible, if a sergeant ever was, and he kept on playing me dirty tricks. He was forever making me demonstrate disarming motions and hand to hand fighting holts to Missoula Red, because he knowed it would give me strains and bruises, for Missoula Red seemed like he would never learn the science.

I never went to demonstrate to him once but what he'd forget the science and start fighting and rasseling; and with me busy showing the science of the motions and holts, I'd often be caught, of course; and even though I'd tried to hint to the fool, time and again, to go easy, as it wasn't real fighting, here the first thing I'd know my rifle would be tore out of my hands, if it was disarming; or I'd hit the ground with all the wind knocked out of me, if it was hand to hand fighting.

But I could never get mad at Missoula Red. He'd help me up, cussing himself for being so chuckle headed and beg me so politely to go ahead and show him the science that I could never get mad at him. Not five minutes ago I had got a big bruise back behind my left leg when I went to demonstrate to Missoula Red and found myself setting down hard on the stacking swivel of my rifle. But I wasn't mad.

"Corporal, I'm sorry as all get out," Missoula Red had apologized. "I reckon you might as well give me up. I simply ain't got sense enough to pound sand in a rat hole. Knockin' you down thataway! Well, if I don't learn the science this trip, I'll go to the sticks yonder and shoot myself!"

And he had gritted his teeth, buckled down and done the bayonet fighting just right from then on. You simply couldn't get mad at Missoula Red.

He was bowlegged, and stooped, too, as so many of the Montana men were. But he had wider shoulders and a bulgier chest than the run, and he was more of a smart character. He had the kind of weather beaten, rusty red face and pale gray eyes which hardly tells a man's years, but we all suspicioned he was 'way over the draft age. His bristly hair was a peculiar dark red, and it had a gray look around the roots that was getting stronger all the time, like it was probably dyed. Yesterday Lieutenant Hute, our company commander, who we all called Johnny Hard, had asked him about it.

"Sir," said Missoula Red solemnly, "I'm a-hopin' the Lieutenant ain't thinkin' I lied about my age just to get drafted in this ter'ble war, as everybody calls it. Oh, no, sir! What's a ailin' my hair, sir, is that I'm a nacheral born

coward; but while I scare bad, I scare slow; and the gradual whitenin' of my hair, sir, is a consequence of my ter'ble but slow scare over this war."

"You go to hell," said Johnny Hard, and that was all.

MISSOULA RED was in my billet squad, and he had taken quite a liking to me right from the first, especially after he learned I was from a Kansas farm town, while most of our Company F noncoms were Chicago men. Missoula Red said I seemed more Western to him. He declared that as a cow lover he couldn't abide packers or packers' towns. I figured it out that he never thought much of Chicago.

But he certainly was patriotic about Montana, calling it God's country and bragging about its history and geography. I got to admiring it myself after he'd described some of its wonders and marvels. Missoula Red was quite a figure back in Montana. He was a grandson of Buffalo Bill and a grand nephew of General Custer, he admitted one night; and on his mother's side he was a descendant of Michael Patrick O'Butte, the Irishman who had founded the biggest city in the State. He hated to admit it, he said, for he was pretty worthless himself and had never done much to live up to his famous relations. But he had fought well enough in an Indian ruckus once, so that the town of Missoula was named after him.

Well, he told all this in such a serious modest way, and the other Montana men never disputed him, so I had never suspicioned yet that he was about the worst liar that ever lived. I never knowed it till that big ignoramus of a Sergeant Funke, of all people, showed him up. And I never did learn just how much was truth and how much was lies in what Missoula Red told.

Some of it *must* have been so. Nobody could hardly think up such a *pile* of lies. But I never suspicioned him now, as I saw him standing in his place, the most innocent look in his pale gray eyes, the most solemn expression on his weather beaten face.

Johnny Hard called Company F to attention and formed us into platoons, for now it was our turn to charge through the dummies. The leather scabbards were pulled off the bayonets and stuck into the canvas sheaths that hung from our cartridge belts. Above the rifles held at high port the blued steel of the bayonets showed dull, but the filed edges and points flashed in the blazing sunshine. Out over the drill field it was like a crazy quilt of O. D. patches, where the different companies of replacement troops were drilling in their periods of bombing, musketry, automatic rifle and bayonet fighting. We marched around the edges of the quilt to the rows of posts and beams where the dummies swung. The last platoon of Company E was charging through.

"First Platoon—forward—double time —*ho!*"

It was a mighty fine sight as each of our platoons charged, the sharp steel shining, the plunging, leaping Montana soldiers yowling and bawling "Powder River!" as they slashed the prone dummies and gutted the swinging ones.

It was a sight to see and a noise to hear, and it certainly did arouse my fighting heart. I thought then I liked to be a bayonet instructor corporal better than anything else in the world.

BUT AFTER the fine charge through the dummies we had to form for the miserable deploying drill in which we would go into platoon columns, then section columns, then waves, just like we were at the front. It was the most complicated drill imaginable, with such an infernal puzzling lot of formations and signals for them that it seemed like the drill could only have been invented to torment corporals. I had never been able quite to get the signals all straight in my head until the Montana replacement draft come in.

Missoula Red had really been a help. He knowed the signals and formations by heart, and when the squad would get itself

tangled up I would let him straighten it out, as he seemed to enjoy it. I let him for another reason, too, because it annoyed that big ignoramus of a Sergeant Funke. Three or four times the sergeant had bawled out—

"Hey, who's corporal of that squad, anyway?"

If anything could tickle me it was to annoy the sergeant, so I would allow Missoula Red to enjoy himself untangling the squad. He told me the reason he knowed the deploying drill so well was because his grand uncle, General Custer, invented it, and he himself had learned it as a boy. When I found out what a liar Missoula Red was I doubted if he had learned it as a boy; I even didn't expect that General Custer invented it, for the rumors in the A.E.F. was that the Frogs did. Still, I let my good nature get the best of me, like I usually did, and allowed Missoula Red to go on enjoying himself.

THIS afternoon the majors of the 1st and 2nd Battalions had planned some kind of sham battle. First Company F marched abreast of Company E in section columns across the drill field to the North woods; then our company deployed in two waves, with a two platoon front; and we scrambled through the brush, fell prone, crawled on our bellies, up and double times, fell prone again, and so on; and the sergeants were sending scouts, automatic rifles and bomb squads ahead, runners back and making some of the riflemen climb trees to spy out the "enemy."

It was Missoula Red who shinned up a tree without any orders and first spied them; and then I led my squad behind him to a clump of trees from where we "opened fire" on two of the "enemy's" automatic rifle squads and a bomb squad. Then everybody laid prone and went to "rapid firing," and pretty soon we "ceased firing" and just laid there while the two majors and the company officers inspected the lines.

Johnny Hard got a lot of praise from our major, and Sergeant Funke had to admit I'd led my squad into a good position. We all felt good about the way we'd come through the battle, though we were all a mess, with rubbish and ants inside our clothes and dust, burs and stickers all over us.

"Well, General Custer, we licked 'em," I said to Missoula Red, "but where's all your scalps?"

I chuckled when I said it, for it seemed like a pretty good crack; but it was lost on Missoula Red. He was always so serious. It was his drawback.

"Oh, we never take scalps in Montana," he said, with the soberest look in his pale gray eyes. "It's always whiskers. You know, the Injuns all used to wear whiskers clean to their knees. When I was growed into an Injun fighter, I started the idee of whiskerin' them in turn for them a-scalpin' us. And it put such a fear in 'em, you never see an Injun nowadays but what he's clean shaved."

Well, I thought it was funny I'd never heard before that Indians used to wear whiskers to their knees; and I half doubted it now, until I decided he was referring to only the Montana Indians. I was about to ask him, when we were brought to attention and formed into a column of squads for the three mile march to our billet town of Houel.

THROUGH the sultry heat of the late afternoon and the dust that fogged up from the rocky road we tramped on at a mighty lick. The summer was getting on and there were small stacks of hay around the farmhouses now. Young chickens, pigs, geese and calves were showing their summer's growth. In the orchards and vineyards the fruit was beginning to ripen. The bean poles were heavy with vines and the potato patches were covered with green leaves and yellow white flowers. The grain had turned yellow. The far woods were dim in a heavy summer haze.

This was just the old, level, beautiful, peaceful French country, but the sweating, marching soldiers yelled about Powder River away back in the Montana Mountains.

"Galloping Company F" was a quarter a mile ahead of the rest of the battalion when we got to Houel. Then it was the rush of cleaning up and shaving, standing retreat, eating mess, and the hour of noncoms' school. Eight hours of drilling, two hours of hiking and an hour of study, and a day of soldiering right was done.

And then I just sprawled out in the shade of a billet, puffed on my corncob and enjoyed a little breeze that blowed along as the sun went down.

I enjoyed everything fine until I happened to look over across the street and saw Odile laughing like all get out with that big ignoramus of a Sergeant Funke. She was wearing a new shawl, and I was so disgusted to see about twenty francs more of my crap money around that fickle woman's neck that I would have got up and quit enjoying myself if Missoula Red hadn't come along. He set down and went to telling me about Montana geography.

He run on for awhile in his sober, serious way, just sort of remarking about some of the wonders he'd seen, like a creek which was so strong with alum that the water would pucker the hoofs of a horse to the size of clothes pins whenever one waded through it. And he told of a place called the Echo Mountain country, where it took the echo so long to come back that he could lay down in his blankets of a night, yell, "Wake up, Missoula Red!" go to sleep, and eight hours later the echo would rouse him out with a "Wake up, Missoula Red!"

And he told of a country where every blessed thing was turned to stone, even the grass, and some elk which looked like they were pasturing on the grass, natural as life.

"And I'm tellin' you there is peetrified birds' nests in the peetrified trees, too, and peetrified eggs which you can—"

"Yeah," broke in his Indian looking bunkie, squatting in front of us. "Yeah, I rode through that country myself. And it's not only like he says, but out on the peetrified limbs of the peetrified trees the peetrified birds are singin' sweet little peetrified songs. And, besides—"

"Corporal," broke in Missoula Red, "let's be on our way. Let us hence to the Red Bull Café and leave this unregenerate Ananias to his sins. For I swear he's goin' to begin to lie about Montana. It's his one failin'. And I simply ain't got no charity for it. I can't bear to hear no lies about God's country."

He took took my arm and we got up and walked down the street, leaving his bunkie staring after us. I was beginning to get suspicious of Missoula Red; in fact, I had really been suspicious of him all along. But I didn't have anything else to do in my spare time, on account of Odile being so fickle and Sergeant Funke being so contemptible, so I would let Missoula Red run on, and amused myself by listening to him. Now he went to telling me about a hunting trip he'd taken once in the wildest part of Montana.

ONE EVENING when he was about half starved he saw an elk feeding no more than twenty-five yards away, it looked like. He drawed down and fired on the easy shot, without hardly aiming. But the elk didn't even raise its head. He took more careful aim the second time, but the elk just went on feeding. It was the same way the third shot. By then Missoula Red was in a regular raging fury, and he clubbed his rifle and charged, yelling—

"Well, you cussed deef critter, I'll *beat* you to death, if that's the way you're determined to die!"

Suddenly he slammed into something so hard he was knocked back flat. He set up and stared, but he couldn't see a blamed thing, only the elk still feeding away. About flabbergasted, he went to feeling along, and it just about made him silly when he discovered he'd run into an invisible mountain. It was a mountain of telescope glass, that's what it was, and he'd been looking through it at the elk.

"And instead of the critter bein' only twenty-five yards off," said Missoula Red, as we stepped through the door of the Red Bull, "he was twenty-five miles.

That's our Montana glass mountain for you."

I was marveling about it when we joined the Company F gang around the big table in the back room, and after I'd had a few sups of vin roosh I went to repeating the whole amazing story myself. Sergeant Funke came in before I was done and he listened with a sneer on his ignorant face. Then, without never being asked, he butted in, set down, poured himself a glass of wine, took a sup of it, set the glass down and gazed at it with the fool solemn look of an owl, and went to bragging on himself, like he usually did. He'd been everywhere and done everything, to hear him tell it. I got the sneeringest look I could on my face while we listened to him brag.

"One time, gang, I took a trip to Montana myself," said the sergeant. "At the time I was head bartender for Woodbridge and Fitzgerald on Clark St."

I had to laugh to myself. To hear him tell it, Sergeant Funke had never had to work up to anything in his life. He'd always been a head bartender. It was nothing to brag about, anyway, and once I had got a good laugh on him when he said he'd make a trip to my home town of Clevisburg, Kansas, when the war was over and give the girls there a treat for once in their lives.

"Yes, you would," I came back at him. "You'd get yourself a treat in jail. That's what happens to bartenders in Kansas."

Everybody laughed, and I had to chuckle myself, for it seemed like a pretty good crack. But nothing could stop his bragging.

"Woodbridge and Fitzgerald prided theirselves on the finest mint julep north of Kentucky," the sergeant went on, "and they sent me out on a scoutin' trip to see if I could locate the bourbon springs supposed to be in what is now the Glacier Park country. They was supposed to bubble up in a ten mile patch of mint. Why nobody had never homesteaded it I didn't learn till I went to the country myself, and—"

"I can tell you, Sergeant," said Missoula Red, nodding shrewdly. "I tackled homesteadin' them bourbon springs once my own self and I—"

"YOUR miser'ble failure was one of the first things I heard about," said Sergeant Funke, butting in like he always would. "Yeah, I'll tell the cockeyed world you had a time, didn't you? But I—hell, I'm out of a smoke. Thanks, Karsak. Well, of course I had only been scoutin' about the country a short while and was still forty miles from the springs, when I found that all around it was simply lousy with wimpusses.

"The wimpuss, gang, as maybe you don't know, lives in the hollow tops of the Montana tub trees. There he hides till man or beast comes close underneath, then down the wimpuss swoops. It's a devilish kind of fowl, with the big awkward size and the hard boiled disposition of a bearcat, the wings of a steer hawk, and the ropy tail of a hokus. He's got a sharp mouth, and you can't shoot a wimpuss, for he snaps the bullets with his teeth and eats 'em.

"The only way, gang, the wimpuss is generally got the best of, is by temptin' him with full cream cheese, for which he has a crazy appetite. You take a piece of fresh full cream cheese and nail it tight to a waterfall. It's got to be nailed tight enough to make the wimpuss claw to get it, so that he'll be sure to wet his feet.

"Wet feet always throws the wimpuss into such a rage that he will forget his appetite for even cream cheese and hunt for a patch of grass to wipe his feet on. The minute he lights on the grass and starts to wipin' his feet you got to sneak up behind him and tie a noose in his ropy tail.

"Then you have him caught cold; for when a wimpuss flies back to his tub tree after wipin' his feet he always takes a look back underneath to be sure he's dried 'em good; and so he will catch his head through the noose of his tail and choke hisself to death.

"Of course, it's plain to see that wimpuss huntin' is about the most dangerous

kind you can imagine. A wimpuss hunter never lasts long, for sooner or later a wimpuss will catch him tyin' the noose in his tail; then he will flip the noose around the hunter's neck, draw up on him, finish wipin' his feet, and then fly up to his tub tree with the hunter danglin' behind. The hollow tops of the Montana tub trees are full of the bones of men who tried to get famous huntin' the wimpuss.

"I give up the idea of homesteadin' the bourbon springs when I learned all that, of course, for there was only one other way to get the best of the wimpuss. That is to make him laff hisself to death. The wimpuss is the hardest fowl alive to tickle, but once he *is* tickled, he's a gone wimpuss. Once he starts to laffin' he laffs till he dies. All that was needed, the Montana people told me, was to bring something into the wimpuss country that was funny enough to look at; then they'd all be tickled to death; and the bourbon springs could be homesteaded.

"And now, gang, just take a real honest-to-God look at Missoula Red there, and then try to figger why he never ruined all the wimpusses! She's too much for me, I admit. Gimme a match, somebody."

Everybody went to laughing at Missoula Red, but I only showed my contempt for the sergeant. He didn't fool me a particle. I knowed he'd only heard that story from somebody else. I didn't believe he'd ever been in Montana in his life. I was about to give Missoula Red the wink, for I saw he was too innocent to doubt anybody; but before I could he went to talking about the wimpusses himself, in the mournfulest, sighingest way imaginable.

"I DID make a good start at exterminatin' the ter'ble pests," said Missoula Red. "I made a powerful good start, and then come what was the biggest and saddest tragedy of my life. I've never gone through anything like it before or since. And I'll never get over it. No, sir, I never will."

He was *so* serious and solemncholy that I stared at him, hardly knowing whether he was in fun or not. I could have sworn that Sergeant Funke had only been bragging a big lie about the wimpuss; it seemed ridiculous to believe there was such a fowl; but I wasn't sure, after looking at the serious face of Missoula Red. But I still knowed that Sergeant Funke had never seen one.

"I must have tickled a dozen to death in the first three days," Missoula Red went on, mournfully still, "and I got proud and stuckup on myself, a-thinkin' I was the greatest nacheral born wimpuss killer that ever was; but, oh, feller men, if I could have seen the end that was to come of my pride!

"Well, to make the sad story short, as I hate to recollect the most woeful and ter'ble time I ever knowed, the fourth day I struck the daddy of all the wimpusses, one that it seemed I could never tickle.

"When this tremenjus wimpuss swooped down on me, he never stopped to look, set back on his hind legs, and then suddenly light on his back, wavin' his paws in the air, beatin' the ground with his steer hawk wings, whippin' his ropy hokus tail in curls over his belly, shakin' his sides while roars of laughter rolled out of his shark mouth, like the other wimpusses all had. No, sir! I stood and looked my funniest; but this tough old daddy of all the wimpusses only swooped down with the glare of a mad buffalo bull, and he scowled as mean and vicious as a—as a platoon sergeant.

"I did my best on him. I tried my singin'. A flicker of a smile come over the wimpuss's face, but it was only a flicker. Yes, sir, I sung 'In the Good Old Summertime' my sentimental-est; but it only made the wise old wimpuss feel the danger I was; and the next thing I konwed he'd lassed me with his ropy tail and I was danglin' under him as he soared up to his tub tree.

"And there I was, dropped down among the bones of many another wimpuss hunter. I felt I was a goner as the wimpuss clutched me in his bearcat paws and opened his shark mouth, but I made a last mad attempt to tickle the wimpuss.

I sung, I preached, I tried to look like I was runnin' for office. I told the story about the cowboy and the chambermaid, and I even tried my imitation of a movie actor cowboy; and I performed so good that wimpusses in the tub trees all around were tickled to death; and even this tough old daddy of all the wimpusses let out one chuckle.

"But he looked away as he made it, and he was scowlin' again as he looked back. And now he drawed his tail tighter around me, he showed his shark teeth in a fearful snarl; and I knowed in my soul that the one miser'ble small chuckle was all I'd ever get out of him. The shark teeth come for my throat. Oh, wouldn't he laff? His lips wrinkled up once—and I hoped—but no, he wouldn't. He never would laff. His tail and his paws squeezed me tighter. Closer to my throat come his shark teeth. Closer and closer. One of them pricked my skin. And then—"

Missoula Red paused to heave a hearty sigh, and he stared so mournfully into his glass of vin roosh that he appeared about overcome. I didn't know what to think, but he was so solemn and serious, and I just *had* to ask. So I said—

"Well, Missoula, how'd you get out of it?"

"Get out of it! Get out of it!" He spoke and stared at me like I'd asked a fool question that absolutely amazed him. "Why, Corporal! Why—of course, that wimpuss *killed* and *et* me!"

I JUST stared at him with my mouth open till I noticed everybody around was laughing their fool heads off; and then without having to figure on it a bit I suddenly knowed that Missoula Red was the biggest liar since Ananias. And I told him so, right to his face. That didn't stop the laughing; and then I realized the gang thought I'd been taken in by Missoula Red right along.

Of course, that wasn't so. His stories had interested me a lot, but, as I told the gang, I'd only led him along to get him to show himself up, and he certainly had. But the gang had to have their fun with me, anyway, and made me pretty uncomfortable. I was good and sore at Missoula Red until he apologized.

He apologized by telling me how he had sympathized with me about the dirty tricks that contemptible sergeant had played on me, and he had only told that lie to show what a big liar the sergeant was in the first place. Well, he proved he was really my friend by getting Sergeant Funke to play a gambling game with him which he called stud poker, and he won all the sergeant's francs.

"Now, I done that for you, Corporal," Missoula Red said to me one night. "And besides, I've found out how we can make that fickle Odile come your way again."

I listened to him, for I had already let my good nature get the best of me, allowing him to go on enjoying himself with my squad in the deploying drill. And this is the way he paid me back—

"I don't s'pose, Corporal, you got that fine and delicate fowl, the snipe, in Kansas?" he asked me.

"Why, no, Missoula, we haven't. Not in my part of the State, anyway."

"So I figgered. The snipe is a scarce fowl wherever you go. He appears to be particularly scarce here in France. It's a powerful shame, too, for if there is a dish the Frogs is fond of, it's snipe fricassee. As a rule, they're even crazier about it than they are over frog legs. Well, Corporal, on account of my likin' for you, I wormed it out of this rival of your'n, Sergeant Funke, that Odile is simply nuts over snipe fricassee. I remember I'd see a snipe t'other day, lurkin' in the woods east of town, and I was about to tell the sergeant I'd help him snare it; but I said, 'No, by all the straw tails and mavericks, I'm goin' to be loyal to my corporal.' So I'll help you snare this snipe, as I'm an expert at it, and as I win all of the sergeant's francs at stud poker, you'll shorely beat his time."

WELL, to show how a man like Missoula Red will impose on a body's good nature, he got me out into the woods that night, left me holding a sack with a

supply room lantern inside it, while he and his bunkie were supposed to be chasing down the snipe. I waited a good hour and a half, and by that time I had it figured out that the infernal big Montana liar had imposed on my good nature again. It was just another fool sell.

I didn't think I'd go back to my billet until everybody was about ready to go to bed, so I stopped in at a 4th Platoon billet, where a crap game was going. I got down to my last twenty franc note, and I was so sore at everything and myself and everything else that I throwed the whole note on the blanket. And of course that ignoramus of a Sergeant Funke had to lean over the ring of crap shooters just as I was saying—

"Somebody fade me so I can win Odile a new hat."

And that contemptible sergeant had got twenty francs from somewhere, and he faded me, saying as he did:

"Come, crap, dice, and I get Odile a new hat."

They didn't come crap, but a fever; and every time I would snap the bones out and say, "Come fever, dice," the sergeant would have to butt in on my talking to them and say, "Come seven, dice, and I get Odile a new hat."

Of course with him butting in that way they didn't come fever but seven and I showed my contempt for the sergeant's butting in by throwing down the bones and leaving the billet without saying a word to him or anybody else.

And so about all I had left was my corporal's stripes.

But I was lucky enough not to get joshed about snipe hunting, for tattoo had no more than blowed when there was an uproar of excitement through all the billets over the order for the replacements to be sent to the front tomorrow to fill up some of the combat regiments which had been shot to pieces. When I got up to my billet Missoula Red and the other Montana men were yelling—

"What's the greatest river in the world?"

"Powder River!"

"She's a mile wide and a foot deep!"

"Some river-r-r-r!"

"I'm a lone wolf from the Bitter Root and it's my night to howl!"

"Wow-w-o-o-oo!"

I was picked for one of the convoy corporals, and the last I saw of Missoula Red was at the combat division headquarters.

"S'long, Corporal," he said solemnly, as he shook hands. "I know I'll never find another one I like to soldier under so well. When it's *fini la gear* and if you ever come to Montana, you just go to the governor and tell him you used to be a corporal over Missoula Red. Then nothin'll be too good for you."

"But what if it's a different governor?" I said.

"Won't make a speck of difference. Nobody can be elected governor in Montana 'less he's a friend of Missoula Red's."

With another solemn handshake he swung away. I noticed that the gray had grown up into the red of his hair quite a ways by now. It would have made him appear funny, if it hadn't been for his naturally serious look.

He clumb over the side of a motor truck and jammed himself into a pile of soldiers. As the truck jerked away he waved his rifle and yelled: "Let 'er buck! Powder River!"

The train of trucks disappeared over a rise.

From away beyond it I could hear an eery rumble every once in a while.

Concluding

A New Mystery Novel of the West, with Hashknife and Sleepy

BUZZARDS

By W. C. TUTTLE

REX MORGAN sat on the porch of the nester's cabin and listened to Hashknife Hartley on the subject of the Black Horse range.

Rex was a tenderfoot, come to the Arizona cattle country to find the person who had sent his mother a check from Mesa City before her death in California. On the way to Mesa City from Cañonville the stagecoach suffered a runaway. Rex had ridden on for help and, in the darkness, he had been struck on the head. He had awakened in the cabin of Lane, the nester.

Now, Lane had surrendered to the sheriff, after Dave Morgan, the shiftless owner of the Flying M, had accused him of murdering Dave's cousin Peter. As far as anyone knew, Rex was no kin of the Mesa City Morgans. Already Rex had accepted the hospitality of the Lanes, and before the murder of Peter Lane there had been bad blood between the Morgans and Old Man Lane. Lane's son had been suspected of killing Peter Morgan's cowhand, Ben Leach, who had been found, shot, by the roadside. As nesters alongside the powerful 6X6 of Peter Morgan, the Lanes had little prestige in the country. Old Man Lane and his son denied their guilt, but surrendered to avoid lynching.

Inside the Lane cabin Nan Lane was preparing a fresh bandage for Rex's head.

"How do you like this country?" grinned Sleepy Stevens, the merry partner of the errant Hashknife.

"I think I prefer civilization."

"You are seeing life in the rough." Hashknife smiled.

"Seeing? Horned frawgs—as Bunty Smith, the stage driver says—I'm living it!"

CHAPTER IX

INQUEST DAY

THE FOLLOWING morning, shortly after daylight, Lem Sheeley and Joe Cave arrived at the ranch with the hack from the 6X6 and a top buggy. They were going to take Peter Morgan's body to Cañonville in the hack, and Lem brought the top buggy to take Nan to the inquest—or rather the double inquest.

This had been the date set for the inquest over the body of Ben Leach; so they were going to hold one over Peter Morgan on the same day. Lem Sheely had appointed Joe Cave to act as his deputy while Noah Evans was out of commission.

"They know Nan was here at the ranch when her brother came from Mesa City and they heard what he said about fixin' one of the 6X6 outfit," explained Lem. "Me and Noah heard it; but they want her testimony."

Nan agreed to go, and while she was getting ready, Hashknife took Lem aside and questioned him about the gun he found in the corral.

"Are you goin' to offer that as evidence?" asked Hashknife.

"I'm kinda stuck about that," said Lem. "I hate to do it, and still I figure I ought to, Hashknife. It'll hang Lane as sure as hell."

"They'll have to catch him first."

"Yeah, I know, but I'll catch him. I wasn't goin' to do a thing until the coroner's jury decides, but if they say it was murder and names the murderer, what can I do? I'm jist an instrument, Hashknife."

"I know, Lem. How's Noah this mornin'?"

"Crazy as a shepherd. The doctor was with him all night, and he says Noah's got a fightin' chance. That ride last night didn't do him a bit of good, and the doctor says we can't take a chance on shippin' him to a hospital.

"The folks down in Cañonville want to go right out and hang a rope on old man Lane and his son. They figure one of 'em mistook Noah for somebody from the 6X6."

Sleepy and Joe Cave were putting the body into the hack, while Rex stood against the side of the stable, watching them.

"What do you think of that young Morgan?" asked Lem.

Hashknife grinned slowly.

"He's so ignorant that he might do somethin' smart. I figure he's been raised in a hothouse, Lem. Still, he's got a sense of humor, and he ain't all fool. Just between me and you, he's got somethin' on his mind."

"Mebbe it's the wallop he got on the head, Hashknife."

"Mebbe."

Nan had come out to the buggy, so the two men sauntered toward the front of the house.

"We'll stay here at the ranch," said Hashknife, as Nan held out her hand to him.

"Thank you," she said simply.

"And when they put you on the witness stand," said Hashknife slowly, "don't offer anythin'. If you don't feel like answerin' a question, jist say you don't know. The law never hung anybody for not rememberin'."

"That's fine advice to a witness, right in my presence," grinned Lem, as he untied the horse.

"I shall follow that advice," said Nan firmly. "Goodby, Mr. Hartley. Take good care of Rex."

"Can't he take care of himself?" growled Lem.

"I don't think so, Lem. He needs somebody to look after him."

"He ort to get a keeper, or a nurse."

THE TWO vehicles rolled away up the dusty road, leaving Hashknife and Rex together at the front porch. Sleepy had gone to the rear of the house to wash his hands.

"So that's the opinion she has of me, is it?" queried Rex wearily. "Need some one to look after me."

"I don't think she meant it exactly that way," smiled Hashknife.

"Oh, I guess she's right, as far as that goes. Mr. Hartley, I guess I do need some one to look after me. I don't know anything."

"Uh-huh?" Hashknife considered Rex gravely. "Morgan, if it was rainin' real hard right now, what would you do?"

"Why — er — go in the house, I suppose."

"I reckon you've got as much sense as the rest of us, but you lack in experience."

Sleepy came around the house and they all sat down in the shade of the porch. Rex wanted to know what an inquest meant, and Hashknife explained all about it.

"And if that jury decides that Mr. Morgan was killed by Mr. Lane, they will hang Mr. Lane?"

"Well, not immediately," said Hashknife. "They will have to capture Mr. Lane and give him a fair trial."

"Have they any evidence that Mr. Lane killed him?"

"Only that Lane hated Morgan and threatened to shoot any of his outfit that might come over here, and the fact that the horse bearing the body of Morgan came from this direction. Of course, those are merely circumstantial. And there's the fact that the sheriff found Peter Morgan's gun in the corral down there."

Hashknife was watching Rex closely when he propounded the last evidence, and he saw Rex change color quickly, shutting his lips tightly. Rex did not look at Hashknife when Hashknife added—

"That last bit of evidence might hang him."

"I don't know anything about it," said Rex slowly.

"Of course not."

"I didn't see the gun."

"Prob'ly not. The sheriff found it. He said that you fainted in the corral."

"Oh, yes!" Rex tried to laugh. "We—Miss Lane and—we heard a chicken crowing, and she made up a little poem about eggs for breakfast; so we went to find the egg, you see. Yes, I fainted. Foolish thing to do, wasn't it?"

"Mebbe not. But neither of you saw the gun, eh?"

"Oh, no. We were excited and—" Rex stopped quickly.

"Excited over what?" asked Hashknife quickly.

Rex shut his lips tightly and looked away for several moments. Finally he sighed softly.

"Eggs," he said simply.

"Excited over eggs?"

"Yes. Oh, it doesn't require much to excite me."

"Uh-huh."

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy exchanged glances. Hashknife was sure that Rex Morgan knew more than he was willing to tell. It was evident that this young tenderfoot was protecting Nan Lane—and Hashknife admired him for it.

"Do you intend to stay in this country?" asked Sleepy.

"Do you mean always?" Rex shook his head slowly. "No, I—well, I don't really know. Do you know, everything has been more or less like a dream since my mother died. I have been jerked around so badly that I hardly know what to do next. I realize that I shouldn't be here, sponging, I believe you'd call it, on the Lane family. But I just simply don't know what to do."

"Didn't you ever have a job?" asked Hashknife.

Rex pursed his lips thoughtfully for a moment.

"Yes, I did. I believe it lasted less than an hour. Mr. Weed, a grocer, employed me as a driver for one of his delivery wagons, but I tried to outrun a fire department."

"And didn't make it?" smiled Hashknife.

"Oh, but I did! But when I was forced to stop, I threw out the anchor, and—"

"Uh-huh!" snorted Sleepy. "That's what Bunty Smith said."

"Threw out the anchor?" queried Hashknife.

"That is what one of the men called it. It is a heavy weight, which they have fastened to the horses, and when you make a delivery you leave it on the ground. It prevents the horses from running away, don't you see?"

Hashknife laughed softly.

"I know what you mean, kid."

"Well, when I threw it off, I believe it wrapped around a pole. At any rate, we stopped so suddenly that I entered a store on the back of my neck, and by the time I had recovered I had lost my position."

"And that's the only job you ever had?"

"The only one."

"How old are you, Morgan?"

"Twenty."

"Your folks have plenty of money?"

"I didn't have folks—just a mother."

"Yea-a-ah?" Hashknife leaned back, resting his shoulders against the wall, and began rolling a cigaret.

"What became of your father?" asked Sleepy.

Rex shook his head.

"I never knew him. In fact, I never heard his name mentioned."

And while Hashknife and Sleepy lounged in the shade and listened closely, Rex Morgan told them of his life. He did not condemn his mother for the way she had raised him.

"Mebbe she wanted you to be a preacher," suggested Sleepy. "Was she very religious?"

"No, not very. In fact, she seldom went to church."

"And you say that check was on the Mesa City bank?" asked Hashknife.

"Yes. That was why I came here, trying to find out who sent her that money. Perhaps they might tell me more."

"Did your mother ever mention Mesa City?"

"No."

"WELL, that's shore a queer deal, Morgan. Even if you never find out anythin', I think you came to the right country. It'll make a man out of you. Get a job. Even if you don't know anythin', take the job and learn. Make good out here. Folks are rough out here, but if you make good with them, they'll stand at your back until your belly caves in."

"I suppose you are right, Mr. Hartley."

"Call me Hashknife."

"Thank you."

"I'm Sleepy."

Rex turned his head and glanced at Sleepy.

"Why don't you go in and lie down?" asked Rex.

Hashknife grunted so explosively that he blew his cigaret out into the yard, while Sleepy slid down on his shoulders, shaking with laughter.

"I don't understand," said Rex blankly.

"That's what made it so funny," choked Hashknife. "He meant that his nickname was Sleepy."

"Oh, I knew that; but I didn't realize it at the time. I guess it did sound rather like a joke."

"Rather," chuckled Sleepy. "But don't mind me; I'm just a bowlegged puncher, tryin' to get along in the world."

"Morgan, you must have had quite an experience the night you arrived here," said Hashknife.

Rex grinned slowly.

"I surely did, Hashknife. I wonder why that man struck me over the head."

"Some of the folks," said Hashknife slowly, "seem to doubt that you got hit. They think you fell off the horse and hit your head on a rock."

"I did not!" indignantly. "Not that I couldn't have done such a thing. You see, I had never ridden a horse before. But there is something that has bothered me, Hashknife. Just before I reached the house I went through a big gate."

"You went through a big gate?" wondered Hashknife.

"I was obliged to get off the horse to open the gate."

"But there is no gate here."

"That is the queer part of it."

"Hm-m-m-m," Hashknife grunted softly as he rolled another cigaret. "Went through a big gate, eh? How was it fastened?"

"I don't remember that it was fastened."

"Uh-huh. But this was the house, eh?"

"I suppose so. It was very dark that night, and I was unable to see more than the outline of the house."

"Are you shore you didn't dream about that gate?"

Rex frowned thoughtfully.

"Perhaps I did, Hashknife. As far as that is concerned, I might have dreamed all of it. But if you do not think I was struck on the head—look at it."

"I saw it," grinned Hashknife. "That's no dream."

"Well, that's no more true than the rest of it."

"You ain't been to Mesa City yet, have you? I mean, to make any investigations about that check."

"No, I haven't had a chance. But just as soon as possible, I shall go over there."

CHAPTER X

GUESTS BY NIGHT

IT WAS late in the afternoon when Nan came home, accompanied by a man from the Cañonville livery stable. Hashknife met her, and they walked from the buggy to the house. She did not mention the inquests, until Sleepy and Rex met them in the living room, and the four of them sat down together.

"They asked the sheriff to arrest Walter for shooting Ben Leach," she said bravely. "They say, because he took Ben's horse and gun, it don't look like self-defense. But they say dad murdered Peter Morgan."

"Who testified?" asked Hashknife.

"The boys of the 6X6 testified that Peter Morgan's body came on, roped to

the saddle of his horse. That was all the testimony, except what was said about the fight dad had with Peter Morgan in Mesa City, and that dad swore he'd kill them if they came here."

"And that's all the evidence they needed to name your dad as the murderer?"

"That was all. They didn't ask me to testify. Lem told them about Walter coming home from Mesa City drunk, and what he'said about fixing one of the 6X6 outfit. Lem tried to give his opinion of Ben Leach following Walter, but the coroner wouldn't let him talk, and they almost had a fight."

"And will the sheriff be obliged to capture your father and brother now?" asked Rex.

Nan nodded wearily.

"I guess he will. Oh, I don't know what to do. We haven't any money to hire lawyers; nothing to fight with."

"The court will appoint a lawyer to defend them," said Hashknife.

"To represent them," corrected Nan quickly. "But of what value will he be to us? It is merely a matter of form. Oh, I know enough about the law to know what it will mean. A cow town jury, sitting in judgment on a nester."

"Well," said the optimistic Sleepy, "they ain't got 'em in jail yet, Nan."

"But they will have. Dad and Walter are not far away from here."

"I'd like to have a talk with 'em, before the sheriff gets his hands on 'em," said Hashknife.

"What for?" asked Nan.

"Oh, just to talk about things. I'd like to get their version of things ahead of the rest."

LATER that day Hashknife and Sleepy talked things over from the top pole of the corral fence.

"I tell you it's no puzzle," declared Sleepy. "Old Man Lane killed Pete Morgan, jist as sure as a Californian will lie about his climate. Of course, Pete had no business bein' here. He'd been warned to stay away—and didn't. If me and you was on a jury, we'd turn him loose—because we don't hate a nester. Likewise, this here Ben Leach got his needin's. Hunted for trouble and found it. Self-defense, of course; but you never can convince these natives that Lane didn't bushwhack Leach. Of course, Lane made a mistake in takin' the horse and gun, but he was drunk and mad."

It was a long speech for Sleepy to make. Hashknife lifted his brows in mock astonishment.

"You're gettin' kinda technical, ain't you, Sleepy?"

"Well," confessed Sleepy, "that's the way she looks to me. Whatsa use of stayin' around here any longer? We've got to land a couple of jobs for the winter, ain't we?"

"Did we ever quit before the last dog was hung?"

Sleepy shook his head gloomily. They had been together for quite a number of years, these two drifting cowboys. Their trails had led from the wide lands of Alberta to the Mexican Border, and no matter where they were there was always a hill just beyond, which beckoned them on.

Sleepy had been christened David in the little Idaho town where he was born, but it had soon been changed to his present cognomen, because of the fact that, like a weasel, he seemed to sleep with both eyes open.

He and Henry Hartley had met on the old ranch which gave Henry the name of Hashknife, and together these two cowboys of the itching feet struck out for themselves. The ranges were wide and there was plenty of demand for the services of top hand cowboys, but they did not stay long in any one place.

Fate had given Hashknife an analytical mind. In a different environment he might have been a famous detective, instead of a drifting cowboy, a Nemesis of range crooks, where, in most cases, the six-shooter superseded the court of law.

It seemed as if fate continually threw them into troubled places, no matter which way they traveled, until even Sleepy, prone to argument, admitted that

there was little use trying to dodge the issue. Sleepy analyzed nothing. He was content to follow the lengthy Hashknife, no matter where the trail led, and to be ready for trouble at the finish.

Their remuneration had been small. In fact, they might have better been working at forty dollars a month, as far as the financial end of their partnership was concerned. Two horses, riding rigs, clothes, guns and a few dollars were all they ever had.

"You can't take anythin' with you," Hashknife had often said, when Sleepy remarked about their financial returns. "The farther we go, the less chance we have of livin' to a ripe old age; so what good is the money? I'd rather give, while I'm alive, to see the happiness it brings. And if we had a lot of money, we wouldn't know what in the devil to spend it for."

HASHKNIFE debated Sleepy's résumé of the case. It was a reasonable decision and was probably the decision of everybody who knew of the case; but Hashknife withheld his opinion, because he refused to agree with the masses. To Sleepy the case was closed; but to Hashknife it was just beginning to open.

"They tell me that Paul Lane is a salty old jigger," said Sleepy thoughtfully. "It would be like him to kill a man and send him home on his own horse. I wish I knew what Pete Morgan was doin' over here that night?"

"Evidently tryin' to get Old Man Lane, Sleepy."

"Why?"

"There you are. He came alone. Why?"

"Don't ask me; I'm no mind reader."

"And still you think there's nothin' to the case?"

"I wasn't figurin' any reasons for the killin'."

"There's got to be a reason for the killin', Sleepy. I want to know why Pete Morgan got up long before daylight, saddled his horse and came over here—if he did come here. Of course, we've got no proof that he did, except that the sheriff found his gun in the corral."

"Guns don't fly."

"This 'n didn't have any wings. Sleepy, didja ever see a girl with more nerve than Nan Lane? By golly, she's a dinger. Wants to cry, but won't. It's a hell of a position for her to be in, don'tcha know it? She's up there in the kitchen, cookin' up a meal for us, when down in her heart she wants to lie down and cry her heart out. If I ever get married, I hope I get her kind."

"One that won't cry, Hashknife?"

"Sure."

"You never will, cowboy. Mebbe she won't cry from ordinary causes, but jist let you put on a boiled collar and a white shirt, and she'll cry."

"Is it that bad?" sadly.

"Worse than that, Hashknife. You look jist like a half broke Apaloosie, lookin' over a whitewashed fence."

"I might get one with a sense of humor, Sleepy."

"She'd have to have it, cowboy."

Rex was wandering around the yard, like a lost pup, and finally joined them at the corral.

"I wish I knew what to do," he said sadly. "Nan is up there in the kitchen, crying. I tried to solace her, but it didn't seem to do much good. She's afraid they are going to hang her father, you know. Perhaps I handled the situation badly, when I told her we'd both be orphans, if such a thing happened. And then I asked her to marry me."

"You damn' fool!" exploded Sleepy. "That ain't no time to propose to a girl."

"I didn't know. You see, I never proposed before."

"There's a lot of things you don't know."

"There's a lot of things I want to learn," retorted Rex heatedly.

"That's a lot better," grinned Hashknife. "Use a little profanity and less dictionary. Correct English is great; but out here they think you're crazy. You'll forget how to talk it soon enough. As far as you marryin' Nan Lane—I'd forget it, Morgan."

"What would you support a wife on?" asked Sleepy.

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Well, you're honest," grinned Hashknife. "I reckon you're a good kid, Morgan. You mean well enough. Now forget the marriage stuff for awhile."

"The sheriff wants to marry her."

"Fine. Lem's a good man, got a good job."

"But I don't think she loves him."

"No? Does she love you?"

"I never asked her."

"A-a-aw, hell!" snorted Sleepy. "Let's go and help her cook supper, instead of talking about her feelin's."

IT WAS after supper that night when Paul Lane came home. Rex was washing the dishes and Hashknife was wiping them, much against the wishes of Nan.

"It's the only thing I can do well," declared Rex. "I used to wash them for my mother."

Nan was in her room, and Sleepy was perched on the wood box, smoking a cigaret, when Paul Lane stepped in to the kitchen, gun in hand. Rex was the only one of the three who had ever seen him before. Lane stopped just inside the door and looked at the men.

Rex stopped washing dishes and started to introduce the old man to Hashknife, but the old man stopped him.

"Where's Nan?" he demanded.

"Here, dad."

Nan had stepped from her room, and now she crossed the kitchen to her father, who put one arm around her, but he still kept his eyes on Hashknife and Sleepy.

"Who are these men?" he asked.

"Friends, dad—Mr. Hartley and Mr. Stevens. You have met Mr. Morgan before."

"Yeah, I've met him. I've been around here quite a while, lookin' 'em over through the windows. I didn't quite figure out who they were, but it didn't look to me as though an officer of the law would be washin' dishes."

With as few words as possible she told him everything that had happened since he left the house. She told him of the shooting of Noah Evans, the double inquest, and the verdicts. Hashknife watched the face of the old man during her recital, and decided that Paul Lane was a tough old ranger. He did not flinch at the verdict, but his blue eyes clouded a trifle.

He was not a big man, and age had sapped some of his vitality, but he was wiry, keen eyed, and the hands that gripped the Winchester were muscular and steady.

"Kinda looks as though they had the deadwood on me and the kid," he said bitterly. "We been hidin' out in the brush, wonderin' what was goin' on; so I took a chance. We got a look at you fellers today and wondered who you might be. And we seen Nan come back in that buggy; so I decided that there had been an inquest at Cañonville."

"Why don't the both of you sneak down and give up to the sheriff?" asked Hashknife. "Looks like the only way out of it, Lane."

"And get hung for it, eh?"

"Mebbe not. The law won't hang you without a trial."

"Meanin' that the 6X6 outfit will, eh?"

"Might be more than them in on the deal. There's always a pack of wolves, you know."

"That's right, Hartley. It shore makes it tough for Nan."

"And she's been mighty game," said Hashknife quickly.

"I'm not so game," choked Nan. "I don't know what to do, except to grin and bear it."

THEY moved to the living room, leaving Rex to finish the rest of the dishes, and sat down together. Hashknife wanted a chance to talk with Paul Lane, and this seemed like the opportune time, but before he could frame the opening question the front door was flung violently open and three rifles were covering them through the doorway.

The visitors were Dave Morgan, Red Eller, Spike Cahill and Ed Jones.

There was only one thing to do; the three men in the room threw up their hands. It took Spike Cahill about ten seconds to collect their guns, and then the captors relaxed.

"I reckon that about ends the deal," growled Dave. "We been watchin' for you, Lane. Knowed you'd have to come home, sooner or later."

"Well," said Lane coldly. "What now, Morgan?"

"A lot depends. Get a rope, Spike."

"Just what's the idea of a rope?" asked Hashknife.

"Keep your nose out of it," growled Morgan. "I'd advise you two to hightail out of this country. About the time we tell folks about findin' you here, hobnobbin' with a man wanted for murder, they might talk of more ropes."

"Oh, is this man wanted for murder?"

"You know damn' well he is! Wasn't that girl at the inquest? Don't try to be funny."

Spike Cahill stepped in and flung out the coils of his rope, preparatory to roping Paul Lane

"What are you going to do?" asked Nan. "Don't put a rope on him. Dad will go to jail peacefully."

"Jail, eh?" Spike laughed softly. "You think he will? After we exhibit him in Mesa City? Guess agin, sister."

"You better put your hands up," said a voice at the doorway to the kitchen, and the captors jerked around to see Rex Morgan, holding the heavy, double barrel shotgun against his shoulder, the twin muzzles covering them.

Dave Morgan's hands jerked shoulder high, and the other three were quick to follow his lead. Even a tenderfoot could score a bull's eye with a shotgun at fifteen feet

"Good, kid!" exclaimed Hashknife, while Dave Morgan swore bitterly, as he watched Sleepy gather up all the guns.

"You can take a rest with that gun now," laughed Hashknife.

"Well, I'm glad," sighed Rex. "It is very heavy, and I was afraid some one might know it isn't loaded."

Hashknife backed against the wall, gun in hand and laughed at the expressions on their faces, when they realized that the shotgun was not loaded.

"You can't get away with this," gritted Morgan, facing Hashknife. "We'll show you how to tamper with things that don't concern you. And we'll make that half witted, white faced kid wish he'd kept out of it."

"I got away with it—my part of it," said Hashknife coldly. "I think that kid outsmarted you and saved you from lynchin' a man tonight. And as far as you doin' anythin' about it—cut your wolf loose."

"We were goin' to take him to jail," said Eller.

"You're a liar!"

Eller bristled angrily.

"You wouldn't call me that, if I had a gun, you hatchet faced bum."

"Step into the middle of the room," ordered Hashknife. "Right out here away from the rest. Watch 'em, Sleepy."

HASHKNIFE stepped up to the bed, picked up a six-shooter and walked back to Eller, who stared at him foolishly. With a flip of his wrist, Hashknife dropped the gun into Eller's empty holster and stepped back about six feet and holstered his own gun.

"It's an even break, Eller," he said coldly. "You're a liar; a dirty, forked tongue liar. You've got a gun in your holster, and I'm talkin' to you straight."

Red Eller hesitated. Hashknife's right hand hung limply at his side, swaying back and forth past his holster, but there was nothing about his pose or expression that would indicate a quick draw. For several moments there was no sound, except the breathing of people. Then:

"Don't do it, Red," whispered Spike. "It ain't worth the chance."

Eller licked his lips and shook his head.

"I pass," he said softly. "Mebbe I did lie, Hartley."

Swiftly Hashknife stepped over and removed the gun.

"What's next?" asked Morgan angrily.

"Go home and try to mind your own business."

"All right, but wait until we tell what happened."

"Suits me, gents. Vamoose."

Hashknife and Sleepy followed them out to their horses, where the four men mounted quickly.

"What about our guns?" asked Morgan.

"One of you come back in daylight and get 'em."

"Oh, all right. But you two better not be here."

"We will be, Morgan. *Adios.*"

Hashknife watched them ride away in the darkness, and then he went back in the house, where he found Lane shaking hands with Rex and thanking him for his timely aid with the shotgun.

"Oh, it wasn't anything," said Rex. "I just saw the gun in the corner, and thought I might frighten them with it."

"Well, you shore did," laughed Hashknife. "They know what a shotgun will do at short range, and they took no chances. Now—" he turned to Lane—"what are you goin' to do?"

"I'm goin' to see Walter and get him to go to Cañonville with me. We might as well give up and take a chance with the law. I didn't realize until just now how safe a jail could be."

"Oh, I'm glad!" exclaimed Nan. "Anything would be better than this suspense. But will Walter go with you, dad?"

"I think so. He is tired of dodging in the hills."

"Well, I wouldn't lose any time," declared Hashknife. "That bunch will probably get drunk in Mesa City, and you never can tell what they will do."

"I know," nodded Lane, "but I don't know what to do about Nan. She can't stay here—"

"I can't stay anywhere else, dad. I can't afford to live at a hotel. Oh, I'll be all right."

"We'll stay awhile," offered Hashknife. "I can't run away now; not after that warnin'. As soon as you see the sheriff, send him up here. I want him to understand about that warnin', 'cause I might need an official reason for throwin' lead."

"All right, Hartley. I'll leave my rifle and shells here, in case you need long range."

He shook hands with each of them, kissed Nan and vanished down past the corral in the darkness.

"I guess I better finish washing the dishes," said Rex. "But I wish some of you would load that shotgun. I might have to shoot next time."

"You spoke your piece, pardner," laughed Hashknife. "I'll load the gun for you."

He took a box of shells off a shelf and dropped one in each barrel, after which he stood the gun in a corner.

"Thank you so much," said Rex.

"Good huntin' to you, brother," grinned Hashknife.

"Oh, but I'm not going hunting for any one."

"You won't have to. In Arizona, that kind of game comes right up to your door."

CHAPTER XI

WHISKY TALKS

IT IS doubtful whether any of his friends would have recognized Napoleon Bonaparte Briggs, as he stood against the Oasis bar that night. On his narrow, slightly grizzled head was an ancient brown derby hat, several sizes too small. Around his skinny neck was a high, batwing collar, plenty large enough for Napoleon to sink into up to his generous ears, and his bosom was resplendent in a once white starched bosom shirt—strange garb for Peter Morgan's old ranch cook.

He wore no vest, no necktie, and his old brown coat showed evidences of its long vacation inside a warbag. His overalls were glaringly new, tucked inside a pair of high heel boots, which emitted an unmistakable odor of stove polish. Inside the waistband of his overalls, the butt of it reposing against the lower edge of his shirt bosom, was a heavy Colt revolver.

And Napoleon Bonaparte Briggs was drunk. It was seldom that Briggs ever came to Mesa City on a drunk, and no one had ever seen him dressed in this manner.

"I'm goin' awa-a-ay, fer, fer awa-a-a-ay," he sang mournfully. "Where the swee-e-e-et swy-ring-ga bloo-o-ooms."

"You thinkin' of takin' a long trip?" asked the bartender.

Nap cuffed his derby over one eye and considered the bartender solemnly.

"Feller, when Napoleon Bonaparte Briggs dudes up thisaway, he's halfway there."

"Ocean voyage, Nap?"

"Not unless there's a cloudburst between here and Cañonville. I aims to ride a fo' legged hoss. Gimme another scoop of that liquor, which tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, and charge it to the house."

"Can't do that, Nap. Jack says to make everythin' cash, until he finds out what's to become of this place."

"Become of it?"

"Yeah, you know, since Peter Morgan died."

"Oh, yeah," sadly.

"Have one on me."

Napoleon considered the bartender thoughtfully, as the glasses were placed on the bar, and he saw the bartender take money from his own pocket and put it in the till.

"Well, here's luck, Nap," said the bartender.

They drank their liquor straight, and Nap cuffed his hat to the back of his head.

"I reckon I'll keep you," he said seriously.

"Keep me?" queried the bartender.

"Uh-huh. You're kinda human. I thought at first that I'd do m' own bartendin', but mebbe I won't. Now, let's have one on me. I've got money."

Came the staccato thudding of hoofs, the rattle of spurs on the wooden sidewalk, and in came Dave Morgan, leading the boys who had been with him at the Lane ranch. They were all thirsty and mad, and it required two rounds of drinks, before they were able to discuss the events of the evening.

Napoleon moved to the end of the bar, standing in solitary grandeur, as if not wishing to associate with the common herd in his present habiliments.

"My Lord!" blurted Spike Cahill, spying Napoleon. "There's the ghost of Old Man Briggs, lookin' over his own tombstone!"

"Oh, to the devil with him!" snorted Dave Morgan, invigorated by the potent liquor. "Let's decide what's to be done."

"And not a gun in the crowd," said Napoleon, noting the empty holsters. "O-o-o-oh, I'm go-in' fer, fer awa-a-ay, where the swee-e-e-e-et swy-rin-ga bloo-o-o-oms."

"What's the idea of the boiled clothes, Nap?" asked Spike.

"Celebratin' m' releash from bondage, Spike. I'm through cookin'."

"No-o-o-o!"

"Yes, sir. Been rasslin' pots for the 6X6 for over twenty years, and it's time I retired."

JACK FAIRWEATHER, manager of the Oasis, came in beside Dave Morgan, nodding to each of the boys. Fairweather was a small man, about fifty years of age, who had been long in the employ of Peter Morgan.

"I've been tryin' to get some dope on this situation," he told Dave. "Nobody seems to know just what is to be done. As far as I can find out, Peter left no will. He never had any use for a lawyer, and they tell me at the bank that there is no will, as far as they know. What's to be done?"

"I dunno," growled Dave. "What's usually done in a case of this kind?"

"Well, I suppose the property belongs to his nearest relative. You ought to know who that would be, Dave."

"He didn't have no real close relatives, Jack. His mother and father are both dead, and he was the only kid they had. There was just two boys in the family, my father and Pete's father. They're both dead."

"Well, it looks as though you owned somethin', Dave."

"I suppose so. As long as there's no will—"

"Who the hell says there ain't?" demanded Napoleon.

And thus Napoleon became the center of attraction. He had been so long with the 6X6 that it might be possible he *did* know something of interest. Dave Morgan glared at him, but Napoleon was too drunk to mind a glare.

"What are you talkin' about?" demanded Dave.

"What do you know about it?" countered Napoleon.

He almost lost his derby, giving his head a quick jerk.

"What about a will, Nap?" asked Fairweather.

"Oh, thasall right," muttered Napoleon foolishly.

"Did you ever see a will?" asked Spike.

"I've seen a lot of 'em."

"A lot of 'em that Peter Morgan wrote?" asked Fairweather.

"Nossir."

"Drunk as a boiled owl," grunted Red Eller. "He don't know what it's all about. Let's have another drink."

"I'm not drunk," declared Napoleon. "I know a will, when I shee one. Gimme shome of your tannin' fluid."

"What's the idea of the clothes?" queried Spike.

"Duded up f'r a trip to Cañonville."

"Napoleon," grinned Spike, "have you got a girl?"

"Nossir, I ain't got no girl; I'm goin' on 'ficial business to the county sheat. These are m' 'ficial clothes. Here's m' regards, gents."

NAPOLEON drank a full glass of liquor, groped his way to a chair, where he flopped down heavily. His derby rolled off across the floor, and Red Eller kicked it the length of the room. But Napoleon was not too drunk to witness this bit of horseplay, and his hand groped drunkenly for the butt of his six-shooter. But after several ineffectual efforts to draw the gun, he made a gesture of despair, slumped down in the chair and began snoring.

"If he'd been sober, he'd have killed you, Red," declared Spike.

"If he'd been sober, I wouldn't have kicked the hat."

"Hell!" snorted Ed Jones. "If he had been sober, he wouldn't have worn such a lookin' hat."

"Who cares what he would have done?" growled Dave. "What I want to know is, what are we goin' to do?"

"Search me," said Spike. "I know I'm not goin' back there agin' tonight."

"Goin' to crawfish on this job?"

"Not crawfish, Dave. Old Man Lane won't be there; so what could we gain by goin' back?"

"I reckon that's true."

Dave explained to Fairweather what had taken place at the Lane ranch, but the gambler had no suggestions to offer.

"I'll ride down in the mornin' and collect the guns," offered Spike. "I'm not scared. They said we could have 'em in daylight."

Red Eller and Ed Jones decided that they wanted to play a little poker, and Dave Morgan wanted to go home; so Dave went away alone. Others drifted in and the games filled up, while Napoleon Bonaparte Briggs slept off his jag, and awoke, with a stiff neck and the disposition of a grizzly.

He found the brim of his derby hat, which Red Eller had kicked loose from its crown, and it pained him greatly. He accepted a drink, went out to his horse, where he mounted and headed for Cañonville.

"If that horse ever bucks, that collar will slice old Briggs' ears off," declared Spike Cahill. "Funny old coot. Him and Pete Morgan was pretty close friends, even if they did cuss each other out at least once a day."

"What do you suppose he meant—about that will?" asked Jack Fairweather.

"Liquor talkin'. Old Briggs would rather argue than eat. The minute somebody says, 'There is,' old Briggs is sure to

say, 'There ain't'. But I sure don't *sabe* that boiled shirt and collar and the hard hat."

CHAPTER XII

BUZZARDS

IT WAS three days after the voluntary surrender of Paul Lane and his son that Hashknife, Rex and Lem Sheeley rode to Mesa City from the Lane ranch.

Spike Cahill had come to the ranch the day after the attempt to capture Paul Lane and recovered the guns. If Spike bore any malice toward Hashknife, Sleepy or Rex he failed to show it, but at that time he did not know that Paul Lane had surrendered to the sheriff.

Both men had sworn that they were innocent of the charge, and they both denied shooting Noah Evans, who was slowly recovering. Long Lane swore he had not seen Ben Leach after Leach left the Oasis Saloon and that he did not take Ben's horse and gun.

Of course, no one believed the father and son, and every one knew that they had surrendered to the law rather than take a chance of being lynched. Their guilt was so firmly fixed in the eyes of the cattlemen that any twelve men in the county would have convicted them without leaving the jury box.

Sleepy urged Hashknife to forget the case. As far as he could see there was nothing to keep them in the Black Horse range any longer, and Sleepy was anxious to get settled to a job for the winter.

But Hashknife was not satisfied. The shooting of Noah Evans was one thing unexplained. After talking with Paul Lane, he was satisfied that neither the old man nor his son were bitter enough against the 6X6 to bushwhack one of that outfit, especially when the light was so bad that they could not identify their target.

And there was Rex Morgan, whom Sleepy had dubbed the Orejano. Who in Mesa City had sent money to Rex's mother, wondered Hashknife? And that was the reason why Hashknife, Rex and the sheriff had ridden to Mesa City. Hashknife had talked it over with Lem Sheeley and decided to seek information at the Mesa City Bank.

JOHN HARPER, the Mesa City banker, a small, wiry man, with heavy glasses, welcomed Lem and Hashknife cordially. Harper had known the sheriff for years.

"Well, what's on your mind, Lem?" he asked, after Lem had introduced the others.

"Peter Morgan banked with you, didn't he, John?"

The banker smiled slowly

"What banking he did—yes."

"What do you mean by that, John?"

"He didn't do much banking, Lem. Peter Morgan was rather a queer person and preferred having his money nearer than a bank vault."

"You mean he kept it at the ranch?"

"I suspect he did, Lem."

"Well, here's somethin' we want to find out, John", and Lem explained about Rex's mother's receiving the seventy-five dollar check.

The banker listened closely, and when Lem finished he shook his head thoughtfully.

"Was that the only check from here that you have seen?" he asked Rex.

"That was the only one, Mr. Harper. But I feel sure that my mother received money from some one."

"The name of Morgan kinda had us guessin'," said Lem.

The banker smiled slowly, thoughtfully.

"I don't suppose I'd be violating any confidence, now that Peter Morgan is dead," he said, "but the fact of the matter is this—Peter Morgan could not write."

"Couldn't write?" pondered Lem.

"He had no education whatever. In fact, when he wished to draw a check, I signed his name for him. So that answers your question regarding that particular check."

"Could it have been Dave Morgan?" asked Hashknife.

The banker shook his head quickly.

"No. Dave Morgan closed his account with us several months ago. I think I was the only one in this country who knew that Peter Morgan could not write. He was very sensitive about it. I don't believe Dave Morgan knew it. When there were any papers to be signed, Peter always brought them to me."

"You never heard him mention a will, did you?" asked Hashknife.

"No, I never did. I'm sure I would have known about it, if there had been one. I understand you have Paul Lane in jail for murdering Peter."

"Yeah, he's down there," sighed Lem.

"Any question about his guilt, Lem?"

"I hope so, John. I dunno what defense the old man will put up. If he wasn't a nester he might get off. You see, he warned Peter to keep away from his place. There ain't no direct evidence that Morgan was killed on the Lane ranch, but the jury will probably think he was."

"How is Noah Evans getting along?"

"Kinda slow. The doctor seems to think he's out of danger. I reckon he is; he cusses all the time."

They thanked the banker for his information. Lem had other business to transact, so Hashknife and Rex left him in Mesa City and rode back to the ranch.

HASHKNIFE was disappointed. He had expected some information from the banker that might be of some value to him, but as far as he could see, they were up against a blank wall.

Rex had nothing to offer. He couldn't remember what the signature on that check looked like.

"I don't know what to do," he told Hashknife. "I can't stay here all my life. I haven't any money, and no place to go. Rather a puzzling situation, isn't it?"

"Well, we're in the same boat," smiled Hashknife. "But our case is a little little different, except that we can't all pull out and leave that girl here alone. The Lanes haven't any money, either. It looks to me as though we've all got to stay here and see what works out. Me and Sleepy have enough for a grubstake for all of us, I reckon."

"Well, I suppose we'll have to do something like that."

"Sure. But the limb of the law waves so slow in a country like this that we'll wear the seats out of our pants, waitin' for them to try the Lane family for murder. I reckon we'll just stick around and see what happens."

They talked it over with Nan and Sleepy at the ranch. Nan wanted to go to Cañonville and look for a job.

"I might get work in a restaurant," she said. "That would relieve you boys of my presence. I didn't realize the situation until now."

"You are not going to work in any restaurant," declared Rex warmly. "We can get along out here. I've still got my five dollars."

"You bloated financier!" exploded Sleepy. "If you knew anythin' about poker, I'd take that five away from you."

"I don't know anything about poker," said Rex quickly, "but if you want the five, I'll give it to you, Sleepy."

"Thank you," grunted Sleepy, rather taken back by Rex's generosity. "I reckon you're all right, kid; we'll get along. Can you imagine that?" he asked Hashknife, a little later on.

"Rex is all right, Sleepy."

"Shore, he's all right. Pretty heavy on education, but he'll get that knocked out of him in a short time. Do you know, I've got a hunch that Nan thinks quite a lot of him."

"She's sorry for him."

"Yeah, and he's sorry for her. He looks at her like a dyin' calf in the spring thaw."

They took care of their horses and wandered back to the house, where they found Nan and Rex on the porch, talking confidentially. Nan seemed very determined about something, and Rex seemed troubled. Hashknife sprawled on the steps and rolled a cigaret.

"I want to tell you something, Hashknife," said Nan. "Rex don't think I should, but—"

"I wouldn't," said Rex firmly.

"But I think you boys understand," said Nan. "Oh, it won't hurt anything, Rex—not now. We haven't told anybody, except my father."

"Go ahead," urged Hashknife. "I suppose it's about findin' Peter Morgan's body, ain't it? And sendin' it home on the horse?"

Nan gasped, staring at Hashknife.

"What—why, how did you know?"

"Guessed it, Nan. Lem found you and Rex in the corral. Rex had fainted. And then Lem found Peter Morgan's six-gun in the corral. It wasn't more than an hour or so later that the body of Morgan came to the 6X6."

"And you just guessed it?" asked Nan wonderingly.

"Somethin' like that, Nan. I figured that you and Rex had a secret between you. Would you mind takin' me down to the corral and showin' me just how the body laid, and all that?"

"And—and you don't blame us for what we done?" asked Nan.

"Certainly not; I'd have done the same. C'mon."

THEY all went down to the corral, where Nan explained all about the position of the body and how they had secured the horse from the willows across the stream and had managed to rope the body to the saddle.

Hashknife listened closely, questioning both of them as to small details, and even examined the dust closely, where Peter Morgan's body had lain. Nan pointed out the place where the horse had been tied, and Rex took Hashknife over to the spot where he had secured the horse.

The ground was fairly soft along the creek, and Hashknife was able to distinguish the tracks of the shod horse.

"Mr. Morgan must have left his horse here while he went over to the corner of the stable," said Rex.

Hashknife grunted, as he studied the tracks closely. From where they stood the horse would have been invisible to any one at the ranch-house. The presumption would have been that Morgan rode up to the willows from that side of the creek, not taking any chances of being seen, but the tracks showed that the horse had crossed the stream twice; one set of tracks, of course, were made when Rex took the animal over to the corral. It proved that the rider had come in past the corral, crossed the creek and tied the horse over there.

They came back to the bank of the little creek, where Hashknife stopped again to examine the tracks. The stream was about four feet wide and two feet deep at this point. Rex sprang across and went back to the corral fence, while Hashknife squatted on his heels on the creek bank.

Suddenly he got to his feet and looked down the stream, where the water swung around an undercut bank, practically undermining a heavy growth of willows. Something had attracted his attention, and he shoved down through the brush to this spot, where he sprawled along the bank, reaching down in the water.

After some little effort he was able to drag out the object, which he lugged back to a clear space. It was a Navaho rug, about four feet wide and five feet long, which had been rolled tightly and tied at both ends with whang leather strings.

Hashknife cut the strings and unrolled the rug. It was rather difficult to tell how long the rug had been in the water. It was rather discolored, but the pattern was clear enough. The two ends of the rug were of red and gray design, while the center was dead black, with a jagged strip of white, representing the Navaho idea of lightning.

Hashknife carried the rug over to the corral, where he spread it out on the ground. It was a very distinctive pattern, and Nan was sure she had never seen it before. Just why it was in the creek, none of them was able to say. It was not a rug that any one would discard.

Hashknife hung it over the top pole of the corral to dry out, and let it there, dripping down across the poles.

"That must have been a beautiful rug," sighed Nan. "I have always admired Navaho rugs, but we have always been too poor to buy one."

"You can have that one," smiled Hashknife. "Probably take a lot of washin' to clean it up. Lot of that silt has soaked up in it, and it'll take time to get it out. Might be better to let it dry, and then beat it out."

"What would they do to us, if they knew what we had done?" asked Rex anxiously.

"I dunno," smiled Hashknife. "Better not tell anybody else. It would be a point for the prosecution, you know. It would prove just where Peter Morgan was killed. It's too bad you didn't think to get that gun."

"We were too excited to think of anything, except to get the body away from here," said Nan.

"I'll betcha. That was shore some job for you two. Now, we'll just forget all that."

AN HOUR later, Lem Sheely rode in at the ranch. Nan was busy in the kitchen, but the three men were on the porch to meet him.

"I've got a little information for you," said the sheriff, declining to dismount. "After you boys left 'town, John Harper called me back to the bank. You see, bankers are kinda close when it comes to talkin' about things, and he didn't know you very well.

"Here's what he told me, boys. Napoleon Bonaparte Briggs is the one who has been sendin' money to a Mary Morgan. He has been sendin' it for years. John said he never asked Nap about it, 'cause he figured it wasn't his business.

"He said he wondered where Briggs got the money, until one day Peter Morgan told him that Briggs had an interest in the 6X6. Now, mebbe you can find out from Briggs what it's all about, Hashknife. Harper don't know a thing about it, except that Briggs kept a balance in the bank, and mostly every month he sent a check away. Harper says he don't know any Mary Morgan."

"Old Man Briggs is the cook at the 6X6, ain't he, Lem?" asked Hashknife.

"Yeah, a queer old pelican. Been with the 6X6 since these hills were holes in the ground. Don't start any argument, 'cause it won't get you anywhere with him. I wish you luck in findin' out anythin'. Just thought mebbe you'd like to know, so I dropped in. Got to get back before dark."

Hashknife thanked him for the information, and the sheriff rode on toward Cañonville.

"It shore is worse tangled than ever now," said Hashknife. "I reckon the name Morgan is just a coincidence in this case, Rex. But just where does Briggs come in on it?"

"Oh, I suppose we'll never find out," sighed Rex. "But after all, what difference does it make? It can't affect my future in any way. Still, I'd like to know. Don't you see the position I am in? Suppose—" Rex hesitated for a moment—"suppose I wanted to marry a girl, and she asked me about my father?"

"Tell her he died before you was born," advised Hashknife.

"But that would be a lie."

"How do you know?"

"But I couldn't prove it, Hashknife."

"Any girl who likes you well enough to marry you won't make you prove when your father died, kid."

"But I don't even know I had a father."

"Well, you won't have to prove that. Just forget that you went through life kinda one sided on parents. And don't argue with me. I want to set down and think about Napoleon Bonaparte Briggs and a dirty Navaho rug."

SLEEPY went into the house, where he flopped on the old couch, burying his nose in an old magazine, while Rex sat down on a corner of the porch, watching the changing lights on the hills, as the sun sank lower in the west.

It was as if a painter, unsatisfied with an effect, would swiftly blot out a streak of gold and draw in a full brush of violet,

only to change it to a deep mauve, and then to an opaque cobalt, striking new highlights with glowing gold.

Farther to the north a great flock of birds, like a lot of black sheets of paper caught in a whirlwind, spiraled up from among the hills, always traveling in circles. Rex watched them, fascinated. They did not seem to flap their wings, but mounted higher and higher. Some of them circled back to earth, but seemed to come back, flapping their wings, as if in haste to gain altitude.

"What kind of birds are those, Hashknife?" asked Rex.

Hashknife glanced quickly at Rex, turned and scanned the hills.

"Buzzards," he said indifferently.

"I tried to count them, but they weave back and forth so swiftly, and each one looks like the other."

Hashknife relaxed and reached for his cigaret papers.

"Scavengers, Rex; a big bird who smells death, they say. But I don't believe it, because I've fooled 'em. I've stretched out on the desert, played dead, and had them down so close I pulled feathers out of their tails."

"Is there something dead over there, Hashknife?"

"Undoubtedly. They've been having a feast and are pulling out before dark. Mebbe a coyote or two came along and started an argument."

"Dead cow, do you suppose?"

Hashknife squinted quizzically at the gyrating flock, slowly mounting higher. They were not splitting up, as a flock usually does, when the feast is over; but rather they were acting as if something had interrupted them. Hashknife grinned and turned to Rex.

"Let's take a rifle and go over there, kid. It's in a little swale off the road, and we might knock over a coyote."

Rex was willing. Hashknife called to Sleepy, asking him to go along.

"Goin' to ride over?" asked Sleepy.

"It's only a little ways," replied Hashknife.

"Count me out. I wouldn't walk a mile for all the coyotes in Arizona."

Hashknife took Paul Lane's .30-30, and they walked up the road, while the buzzards still circled. It was a little over a mile to where they left the road and about a quarter of a mile from where Ben Leach had been killed.

From the road they went cautiously through the brushy swale, circling the thickets of mesquite. Suddenly a coyote went streaking across the swale, almost invisible in the waning light. Hashknife stepped back, swinging up the Winchester, and as the animal started up the slope of the hill on the opposite side of the swale, the rifle cracked sharply and the coyote gave a convulsive sidewise leap, landed in a Spanish dagger, from whence it went yipping along through the brush, telling the world in coyote language what it thought of a man who would drive a .30-30 bullet in front of the nose of any well meaning coyote.

"Led him too much," laughed Hashknife. "Didja see him set down in that dagger? Talk about anythin' bein' full of pins and needles! I had a hunch that some coyotes had chased them buzzards from their supper."

THEY circled another clump of mesquite and found what had attracted the scavengers. It was what was left of a sorrel horse, which was still wearing a saddle and bridle. The buzzards and coyotes had made a sorry mess of it, but the saddle and bridle were still intact.

With his pocket knife, Hashknife cut the latigo, and drew the saddle away from the carcass. It was a good grade of stock saddle, with stamped seat and fenders. The skin of the animal had been literally torn to shreds, obliterating the brand, but leaving enough to identify its color.

Hashknife examined the head of the animal for possible bullet holes, but found none. Upon closer examination he found that the horse's shoulder had been broken. The bridle reins were tangled about the other leg, drawing the head of the animal sharply downward.

No doubt the coyotes had pulled the

body about to some extent, but Hashknife was able to read the signs fairly well.

"I reckon this was Ben Leach's horse," he told Rex. "It busted its shoulder in some way, leavin' it to hobble on three legs, until the reins got tangled in the other front leg and threw it. Mebbe the fall broke its neck, and mebbe it just couldn't get up, and the coyotes finished it."

"Does it mean anything?" asked Rex.

"Well, it means that Walter Lane didn't steal the horse, which is one point in his favor."

Hashknife hung the saddle in a mesquite thicket, and they went back home, leaving the way clear for the coyotes to continue their interrupted meal. The buzzards had disappeared by this time.

"If it hadn't been for those buzzards, we would never have found that horse," said Rex.

"That's true," thoughtfully. "Some times it's a good plan to foller the buzzards, kid. You never can tell what you might find."

CHAPTER XIII

DAVE MORGAN TAKES CHARGE

"WHAT right have you got to open the safe?" demanded Dell Bowen. "This ranch ain't never been turned over to you, Dave."

Dave Morgan, standing in the center of the 6X6 ranch-house living room, smiled sarcastically at Dell Bowen. With Morgan was Ed Jones, his right hand man. Spike Cahill and Bert Roddy were standing beside a small, old fashioned iron safe against the west wall of the room.

On the table, beside Morgan, was a collection of papers, some money, the miscellaneous stuff which had been taken from Peter Morgan's pockets. Dave Morgan had in his hand a key which he had taken from the table.

"It *will* be, as far as that's concerned," said Morgan.

"Then you better wait until it is, Dave."

"Yea-a-ah? Well, I'm just a little curious to know what's in that safe, Dell. All this talk about wills has kinda made me wonder if there is such a thing. You boys can check up everythin' in there, and I won't take anythin'."

"Well, that might be all right. As long as we put everythin' back, Dave. I don't want to get in bad with the law, you know."

They went over to the safe and watched Dave Morgan insert the key. The safe opened easily. For a moment there was no sound, and then Spike Cahill whistled softly.

The safe was empty! Not even a scrap of paper. Dave got to his feet, looking from face to face.

"Looks pretty clean, don't it?" he asked softly.

"It does," admitted Dell Bowen.

Dave walked back to the table and dropped the key. He did not bother to lock it again.

"I don't quite *sabe* that empty safe," said Bowen. "The boss must 'a' cleaned it out before he got killed."

"You think he did, eh?" sneered Morgan.

"Well, it shore looks thataway, Dave."

"Yea-a-ah? Huh! I don't *sabe* why that key wasn't turned over to the sheriff. Leavin' it layin' around—"

"Wait a minute," cautioned Bowen. "You ain't aimin' to put the deadwood on any of us, are you?"

"I'm not aimin' at anybody," said Dave angrily, "but it don't look right for that safe to be empty, does it?"

"Aw, what the hell?" snorted Spike. "It's empty, and that's all there is to it."

"Mebbe not *all*," retorted Dave. "Pete must have had some money. There's very little in the bank; I found that out."

"Well, what are you goin' to do about it?" demanded Dell. "It shore looks to me as though you was a little previous, Dave."

"You think so, do you, Bowen?" Dave hooked his thumbs over his cartridge belt and glared at the red faced cowboy who

had acted as Peter Morgan's foreman.

"Lemme tell *you* somethin'. This 6X6 belongs to me. It's only a matter of a few days until I move in here and take charge."

"Suits me," grunted Bowen.

Dave hunched his shoulders and scanned the faces of the three 6X6 cowboys.

"And I'll prob'ly hire my own crew," he added meaningly.

"And far as I'm concerned, you can hire 'em right now, Morgan; I'm through."

"Same here," nodded Spike, and Bert nodded in agreement.

"You don't need to go off half cocked," said Dave quickly.

"As far as I'm concerned, you can go to hell," said Bowen coldly. "And another thing, Morgan; don't ever make the crack that any of us unlocked that safe. If you do, we'll shore take you apart to see what makes you tick."

"I don't reckon I need to make any cracks, Bowen. And as far as takin' me apart is concerned, I'll be right there, showin' you what makes me tick."

THE THREE cowboys headed for the door.

"You might take Napoleon Bonaparte Briggs along with you," said Dave. "I reckon I can find a cook."

"He's gone already," growled Spike. "Pulled out several days ago. The night the tenderfoot made us back water with an empty shotgun, Old Man Briggs headed for Cañonville."

"Well, if you see him, you can tell him he don't need to come back."

"If he knows you're here, it's a cinch he won't want to."

It did not take the three boys long to pack their belongings in their warbags. Dave Morgan and Ed Jones sat on the spacious porch of the ranch-house and watched them saddle their horses and leave the ranch.

Dave Morgan smiled around at his possessions. The 6X6 was the biggest ranch in the country. Even the stable was a better building than the ranch-house at the Flying M.

"Got kinda salty, didn't they?" grinned Dave.

"They allus have been," said Ed slowly. "I was wonderin' about Old Man Briggs, Dave. He pulled out several days ago, and he had plenty chance to open that safe."

Dave smiled thoughtfully.

"I'll betcha you're right, Ed. That old pelican cleaned out that safe and skipped the country. I'll get in touch with the sheriff as soon as I can, and we'll see if we can't find Briggs. He's the man."

"Another thing," said Jones. "You'll have to hire some punchers, Dave. We can't run both places. What you ort to do is to hire a crew to run the Flyin' M, and let us come here."

Dave pondered a moment.

"Might be a good idea. I dunno where I'd find any men right now."

"How about them two jiggers at the Lane place. Oh, I know you don't like 'em, but they look like cowmen, Dave."

"I know," nodded Dave. "I kinda hate to go ahead and hire a crew until this thing is all settled up, but I reckon I might as well. Tomorrow I'll go down to Cañonville and have a talk with a lawyer. He can fix it all up for me, and in the meantime I'll ride down to the Lane place and have a talk with them two fellers. I don't quite *sabe* what they're doin' around here, and it might be a good scheme to have 'em where we know what they're doin'."

"You don't think they're in here to pull anythin' crooked, do you, Dave?" asked Ed.

"*Quien sabe?* They're shore backin' the Lane family, and I might be doin' the law a favor by hirin' 'em away from the Lane ranch.

"You can stay here, Ed. Mebbe you better ride back to the ranch and get Red to come over with you. Move your stuff over. I'll stay at the Flyin' M with Cal, until I get things fixed up. And I'll see if I can rustle a cook for here. Then I'll be all set."

THAT same morning Hashknife had been doing considerable thinking about the dead horse they had found, so he decided to ride to Cañonville and have a talk with the sheriff. Nan wanted to send some clean clothes to the jail; so Sleepy decided to go along. With both of the Lanes in jail, there was nothing for Nan to be worried about, as far as the 6X6 was concerned. Anyway, Rex would stay.

After Hashknife and Sleepy went away Rex investigated the Navaho rug and found it practically dry. He carried it up beside the house and proceeded to hammer the dirt out of it. Armed with a section of broom handle, he beat industriously, and was so engaged when Dave Morgan rode up.

Rex was a bit apprehensive when he saw who the rider was, but Dave's grin was reassuring.

"Cleanin' house?" he asked, glancing at the rug.

"Not exactly," said Rex, wiping the perspiration off his nose. "Mr. Hartley discovered this rug in the creek yesterday. I doubt that I shall ever be able to beat the dirt out of it."

"Found it in the creek, eh?"

"Yes. Queer, isn't it? Looks like a good rug. It has a very distinctive pattern, don't you think?"

"Yea-a-ah, it has."

Nan came to the door and saw Dave Morgan. He smiled at her and lifted his hat.

"How do you do, Miss Lane?"

Nan nodded coldly.

"Aw, let's be friends," he laughed. "I don't blame you for the way you feel. No? Well, I'm sorry. Where's Hartley and his pardner?"

"Oh, they went to Cañonville today," said Rex quickly. "We found the horse and saddle which belonged to Ben Leach last night, and I think Mr. Hartley wished to talk to the sheriff about it."

"Thasso? Where did you find it?"

Rex pointed vaguely toward the hills.

"Out there. It had a broken shoulder, and the coyotes had eaten it nearly all up."

"Yea-a-ah?" Dave rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Well, that's funny."

He turned to Nan.

"Mebbe your brother didn't take Ben's horse, after all. That'll be good evidence in his favor."

"I hope something will be in his favor," she said wearily.

"You just leave it to Hashknife Hartley," said Rex. "He knows things. Sleepy told me that Hashknife saw things that other men overlooked."

"Is that so? I wanted to have a talk with 'em today. I've taken over the 6X6, and I need some help. In fact, I'd like to get them to run the Flyin' M for me, because I want to move my crew over to the 6X6.

"I might be able to use you, too," he said to Rex. "You can learn."

"Certainly, I can learn," said Rex smiling.

Dave looked at Nan thoughtfully.

"You've been cookin' for these three men, ain't you?"

Nan nodded.

"After a fashion."

"Well, now here's what I was thinkin' about. This place don't need much attention. Why don't you all move over to the Flyin' M, Miss Lane. You can do the cookin'. Take what little stock you've got over there. It's better than this. Under the circumstances, there ain't a thing you can do here. That trial won't come off for another month, at least. Why not try a whirl at the Flyin' M? At least you'll get paid for your work."

"Why, I don't know—" faltered Nan. "I—I don't know what to say."

"Well, think it over. When Hartley comes back, talk it over with him. If you want the jobs, you'll probably find me at the Flyin' M. I'm goin' to Cañonville tomorrow to see a lawyer, but I'll be back late in the afternoon. Don't hold it against me for the things my cousin done to you. I'm owner of the 6X6 now, and I don't mind a nester."

"It is nice of you to make us that offer," said Nan.

"Nothin' of the kind; I need you. Let me know what you decide to do. Well, I'll see you later."

DAVE MORGAN tipped his sombrero and rode away, while Rex essayed an awkward dance toward the half cleaned rug. He was delighted with the chance to get a job; but Nan did not share his enthusiasm.

"Why, Nan, he's all right," said Rex. "He's so different than he was the last time he was here."

"Very much different," said Nan seriously. "I can't trust men who suffer such great changes. Hang that dirty rug on the fence and get me some wood. I'm trying to bake an apple pie for supper, and I need a hot oven."

Rex shouldered the rug and turned toward the corral, then swung around, facing Nan.

"If I had a lucrative position, would you marry me?"

Nan flushed slightly.

"That question is a whole lot like the saying 'If we had some ham we could have some ham and eggs, if we had some eggs.' "

"I see," blankly. "Well, I shall get you the wood, Nan. I'm afraid I'll never get this rug cleaned. It seems to be badly stained."

"Well, hang it on the fence."

DAVE MORGAN decided to go to Cañonville that day, instead of waiting until the next, and he was within a couple of miles of the town, when he met the sheriff, Hashknife and Sleepy. The sheriff had considered the dead horse worthy of further investigation, and they were on their way to the Lane ranch.

Dave greeted them in a friendly manner and told them he had been at the Lane ranch.

"Didja see old Briggs in Cañonville?" he asked Lem.

"He ain't there, Dave. What do you want Briggs for?"

Dave told them of the empty safe at the 6X6. He did not directly accuse Briggs of theft, but he intimated that the guilt lay between Briggs and the three other cowboys, with most of the evidence against Briggs, because he had seemingly left the country.

"How do you know there was anythin' in the safe before Peter Morgan was killed?" asked Hashknife.

"I don't know that there was, Hartley; but there should have been. Pete wasn't very strong for banks, and it don't seem reasonable that the safe would be empty, does it?"

"Who had charge of the key?" asked Lem.

"Anybody at the ranch. They had the keys, along with the other stuff they took from Pete's pockets, in a drawer of the table. Any of them could have swiped the key and looted the safe, Lem."

Lem considered the matter gravely.

"It's kinda hard to accuse anybody of theft, when you don't know anythin' has been stolen, Dave. There's no record of what was in the safe. Old Briggs has had several days to make his getaway, and nobody knows which way he went."

"Yeah, that's true. I suppose we might as well forget that safe."

"Best thing to do, Dave. Have you taken over the 6X6?"

"Just about. I'm goin' to see a lawyer now, and have him fix it up."

He turned to Hashknife.

"I need two good men, Hartley. The crew at the 6X6 have quit, and I'm kinda short handed. If you'll take the job, I'll put you in charge of the Flyin' M. I had a talk with Miss Lane and the young feller awhile ago, and I made her a proposition to cook for you. She's cookin' for you now; so she might as well make some money out of it. I can use the kid, too. He ain't worth much, but he'll learn. What do you say?"

"I dunno," smiled Hashknife. "Sounds all right. I'll talk it over with Miss Lane and see what she thinks. We can't step out and leave her alone, you see."

"No, that wouldn't be right. You talk it over with her, and let me know. I want to move my outfit over to the 6X6

as soon as I can. As far as Lane's stock is concerned, he's only got a few head, and you can herd them over to my place."

"Well, that's nice of you, Morgan."

"It'll help me out a whole lot."

HASHKNIFE promised to talk it over with Nan, and they rode on. Sleepy was rather jubilant over the chance to go to work, especially if Hashknife was to have charge of the ranch. But Hashknife had little to say about it.

"Don't you think he's a little previous about takin' over the 6X6?" asked Hashknife.

"Looks thataway," replied Lem. "Still, he might as well, I suppose. Now that he owns the Oasis, he'll probably drink himself to death. Dave's all right though. He's all excited over that 6X6."

"Probably was an awful blow to find the safe empty," grinned Sleepy.

"Sure. Just between us, I'll bet old Napoleon Bonaparte Briggs did clean out that safe. He just about emptied it, and headed out of the country."

"What about his share of the 6X6?" queried Hashknife. "The banker at Mesa City mentioned it to you, didn't he?"

"Mebbe Briggs' share was in the safe," chuckled Lem. "Briggs hated Dave Morgan, and he knew Dave would inherit the 6X6; so he just took his share out of the safe and busted up the partnership. Anyway, it's too bad they didn't turn that key over to me."

They left the main road and soon came to the spot where Ben Leach had been killed. Hashknife had never had much of that incident explained to him, but Lem pointed out where Ben had fallen, according to what the others had told him; they had moved the body before the sheriff had had a chance to view it.

The old road was very rocky at this point. Hashknife dismounted and walked along the right side of the road, which was piled with broken boulders. Suddenly he grunted aloud and reached down among the rocks.

He had found a Colt .45 revolver. The two other men swung down from their horses and came over to him. The spur of the hammer had been broken off, and one shot had been fired. It was a single action gun, well oiled.

Hashknife examined it closely and smiled at Lem, as he handed him the gun.

"There's the missin' six-shooter," he said. "Ben Leach shot himself."

"Shot himself? How do you—"

"Probably ridin' with the gun in his hand, Lem. The horse stumbled on this rocky ground, fell and broke its shoulder, throwin' Ben. See where the spur of that hammer hit a rock?"

"You mean, the hammer hit the rock, fired the shell—and killed Ben?"

"Don't it look reasonable, Lem? He was probably ridin' fast, and when the horse fell he flung the gun on the rocks. The horse got up and went limpin' off across country, until it got the other front foot tangled in the reins, and went down for keeps. You can see that the hammer of the gun hit the rocks and fired that shell."

"Well, by gosh!" blurted Lem. "I can see it all now, Hashknife. It's all simple, when you can see it. Ain't that fate for you?"

"It was his way to die," said Hashknife thoughtfully.

"That's right, I reckon. Nobody ever thought of it bein' an accident. Let's go and find that horse. I want to take the saddle back to Cañonville for evidence, too. After I explain things to the prosecutin' attorney, he'll have to turn young Lane loose. Now, if we could only discover that Peter Morgan accidentally killed himself."

"Mebbe he butted his head against the stable," suggested Sleepy, as they rode up through the swale.

"I reckon we'll have to look further than that," smiled Hashknife.

They found the carcass of the horse, and Lem verified what Hashknife had told him about the broken shoulder. The reins were still twisted around the left foot of the animal. They fastened the saddle behind the saddle on Lem's horse and went back to the road, where Lem

left them and went back to Cañonville. He was anxious to get Walter Lane out of jail.

IT WAS still early in the afternoon, and they discovered that both of them were almost out of tobacco.

"Might as well head for Mesa City and stock up," said Hashknife. "We can get back by supper time. Might also pick up a few cans of groceries, 'cause I figure Nan's cupboard is jist about cleaned out."

They found the three boys from the 6X6 in town, already a little more than half-drunk, quarreling over a dice game.

"We've done quit the 6X6," said Spike Cahill," so you don't need to be scared of us. We're plumb neutral now. Old Dave Morgan came out and took charge today. In fact he became so full of ownership that we pulled out and left him flat."

"That's what he told us," said Hashknife.

"Yeah? I suppose he's braggin' about it. I'd jist like to bend him so bad that every time he coughed he'd snag his nose on his own spurs."

"What became of your cook out there?"

"Old Napoleon Bonaparte Briggs? Did Morgan say anythin' about him, Hartley?"

"Somethin' about bustin' a safe at the 6X6."

"Uh-huh." Spike wiped his lips with the back of his hand. "Well, I dunno. Far be it from me to say he did or didn't. I'm no mind reader. Dave Morgan found the safe empty, and he kinda intimated that some of us had a hand in the thing. We shore called his bet—and quit. I don't say I wouldn't snag me an *orejano*, but I won't rob no penny-ante safe. Let's have us a drink, tall feller. How's the tenderfoot?"

"He's all right," laughed Hashknife.

"What's that lunatic doin' here, anyway? Nobody knows what he came for. I thought he was a weak sister, and I found m'self flat on m' back. I could almost be friends with a feller who can hit that hard. Let's go and have that drink."

Hashknife accepted the drink in order to find out a few things from Spike. He wasn't quite certain of Spike; so he didn't want to rush matters.

"What are you boys goin' to do now?" asked Hashknife.

"We don't know," replied Spike. "We got to get jobs. I think I'll head south, down into the Juniper River country. Used to punch cows down there, and I mebbe can land a winter job."

"You've been on the 6X6 quite a while, ain't you?"

"Two seasons is all."

"I'm goin' to ask you somethin', Cahill," said Hashknife confidentially. "You've been in the 6X6 ranch-house quite a lot, ain't you?"

Spike looked curiously at him, but nodded slowly.

"Yea-a-ah, quite a lot."

"Are there any Navaho rugs on the floor?"

"Mm-m-m-m. Yeah, I think there is a few."

"Didja ever notice one that had a lightnin' mark—zigzag streak of white on a black background?"

"Lemme see." Spike scratched his head thoughtfully. "I'm not awful sure about that, but it seems to me-e-e that I've seen somethin' like that. Now, I can't swear to it. Mebbe Bert or Dell would remember."

DELL and Bert had settled their quarrel over the dice and were ordering their drink, when Spike moved in beside them and propounded the question. They looked solemnly at Spike and wanted to know why he wanted to know.

"This tall feller asked me," said Spike humbly. "I didn't know for sure, so I ask you."

Bowen and Roddy moved over closer to Hashknife, prompted by curiosity.

"What's the idea?" queried Bowen.

"I can't tell you," smiled Hashknife. "I just wanted to know, thasall."

"Uh-huh. We-e-ell," drawled Bowen, "I reckon there is."

"Is it there now?"

"Now, you got me guessin', pardner. I reckon it is."

"Do you remember it, Bert?" asked Spike.

"No," growled Bert. "And I'd crave to know what a darned Injun rug has got to do with this drink I jist won off Dell."

"You didn't win it," contradicted Dell. "You was throwin' sixes, Bert. You had four sixes agin my five sixes, on the last horse."

"I had five sixes and I beat you on the throw off."

"You had four. On your last throw you saw that six on the *side* of the dice—not the top. But whatsa use of arguin' with a drunken cowboy? Have a drink, Hartley?"

"I'll have a cigar, Bowen."

"You know your own limitations. Their cigars are a lot older than their liquor. Would you mind tellin' me what made you ask about that rug?"

"I can't tell you—yet," replied Hashknife, examining the ancient sample of a cigarmaker's art, which fairly crumbled between his fingers. "You don't happen to know where Napoleon Briggs went, do you?"

"If I did, I wouldn't tell," said Bowen quickly. "Mebbe you been talkin' with Dave Morgan."

"Mebbe I have."

Hashknife tried to light the cigar, but it was too porous; so he discarded it in favor of a cigaret.

"Did you boys know that Ben Leach was killed accidentally?" he asked.

"Accidentally hell!" snorted Spike, while the others merely smiled their disbelief.

"He shot himself accidentally," declared Hashknife, and proceeded to describe just how it happened.

"Well, for gosh sake!" blurted Bert. "So that's why we never found that gun and horse. Can you imagine that?"

"It sounds reasonable," agreed Bowen. "Didja work all that out yourself, Hartley?"

"With the aid of the buzzards."

"I know. By golly, I'm glad we never caught young Lane. We would have lynched him sure."

"Why don'tcha go ahead and clear the old man?" asked Bert. "You might prove Pete hammered himself over the head."

"Aw, he couldn't 'a' done it," protested Spike. "He couldn't rope himself on a horse, Bert."

"Might 'a' roped himself on first, and left one hand loose."

"You're a bright pair," said Bowen disgustedly.

DAVE MORGAN came in, nodding pleasantly to Hashknife, but ignoring the three cowboys with him. He talked for a few minutes with Jack Fairweather, and they went together to the rear of the saloon, where they entered a private room.

"Morgan's probably takin' over this place," said Spike. "He'll be the stud road runner of the Black Horse River country, I suppose."

Dell wanted to shake the dice again, and while they were arguing over the game, Morgan came from the private room. Hashknife stepped away from the bar and met Morgan near the door.

"I ain't had a chance to speak with Miss Lane about takin' that job," he told Morgan. "I dunno how she'll feel about it now," and he told Morgan about the evidence which would release Nan's brother.

"I heard about it," replied Dave. "Lem told me about it."

"Oh, you met him, eh?"

"Yeah. Well, if she don't want the job, I'll rustle another cook. You and your pardner and the kid can take the jobs, can't you?"

"Might do that, Morgan. Anyway, I'll talk it over with you tomorrow."

"That's fine. I'm takin' over this place, too."

"Goin' to run it yourself?"

"Ain't decided yet. I'll see you tomorrow."

Morgan left the saloon, and Hashknife went back to the bar, where Sleepy joined

them in a few minutes. He had made the purchases and was ready to go home. The ex-6X6 cowboys wanted them to make a night of it, but Hashknife and Sleepy declined.

It was nearing supper time when they rode away from town, and it was almost dark when they arrived at the ranch. There were no lights in the ranch-house, no sign of any one about the place. When they stabled their horses they discovered that the two extra saddle horses and riding rigs were missing.

"Betcha Nan and Rex went for a ride," said Sleepy, as they headed for the ranch-house.

There was no one in the house. The two cowboys lighted a lamp in the kitchen, and on the table they found a penciled note:

> If we miss meeting you, this note will tell you that we decided to ride to Cañonville. May be back tonight. Don't worry.
>
> —NAN AND REX.
>
> P. S. There's an apple pie in the oven.

"Well, that explains it," said Sleepy, visibly relieved.

"Uh-huh," grunted Hashknife. "I suppose she wanted to see her folks."

"Can't blame her for that, cowboy."

"No, I reckon you can't. That apple pie in the oven sounds good to me."

CHAPTER XIV

IN COYOTE CAÑON

NAN'S decision to go to Cañonville was rather sudden. She wanted to see her father and ask him what he thought of her accepting that job at Morgan's ranch. Rex was of the opinion that she should wait until Hashknife and Sleepy came back, but Nan was rather impulsive.

Together they saddled the horses. Nan wrote the note and left it on the kitchen table, where she knew they would find it.

"We'll probably meet Hashknife and Sleepy between here and Cañonville," said Nan, "and they'll ride back with us."

Rex was not exactly sure of himself in the saddle; so they did not ride fast. His mount was a perfectly gentle horse. Nan's horse fretted and danced, fighting against the bit; but she was a good rider and handled the horse easily.

Rex showed her where the stage broke down the day he came into the country, and they laughed over the things that had happened to him during his short stay in the cattle country.

"Do you really believe I will ever be a cowboy?" he asked, as they started up the crooked grades of Coyote Cañon.

"Do you want to be, Rex?"

"I don't know, Nan. When I look at Hashknife Hartley, I do. But when I look at some of the other cowboys, I'm not sure."

"He's different," she admitted.

"Yes, he is, Nan. Sometimes I wonder what I am doing here. I don't belong here, and no one realizes it more than I do. If I had what Hashknife calls horse sense, I would—oh, I don't know. I'd like to go somewhere and make a lot of money, and—and then come back here and get you."

"And get me?" smiled Nan. "What an ambition!"

"Don't laugh at me, Nan; I'm serious. Ever since that morning, when I awoke and saw you looking out through the window, I've had just that ambition."

"It will be dark before we reach Cañonville," said Nan, turning in her saddle and looking at the fading sunset.

"You always change the subject, Nan."

"I suppose I do, Rex. Why not?"

"Well, I can have ambitions, can't I?"

"I suppose so, Rex. I guess I haven't any. We have moved from pillar to post ever since I can remember, and we have never stayed any one place long enough to have any ambition. Dad has always been restless. I'll bet I have gone to more schools in this State than any other person. We'd stay a few months in a place, and then dad would hear of another range. Then it was a case of pack up and move on. This time he promised me that we would stay."

"Hashknife and Sleepy always keep moving," said Rex. "They have actually killed men, Nan. I don't know how many. I asked Sleepy how many men Hashknife had killed, and he said that he didn't know, because they had lost the complete list. It must have been a great many."

Nan smiled sidewise at Rex, whose expression was serious. She knew cowboys and their well stretched yarns.

"I asked him why it was they never got hung," said Rex seriously, "and he said it was because nobody had ever found any of their victims."

"I should guess not," laughed Nan.

FAR AHEAD of them stretched the grades, winding around the rim of the cañon. They could look down on the precipitous sides of the cañon, where a few piñon and junipers clung to the sides of the slope. Farther down, the tops of larger trees blended with the purple of the depths.

The opposite side of the cañon seemed to be a sheer, rocky wall, as far as they could see in both directions. Coyote Cañon was not an inviting place. Nan had heard her father say that at some remote time an enormous quantity of water had rushed through that cañon, tearing out great holes in the cañon bed. It was a sanctuary for the lion and wildcat, where men had never made a trail.

The short twilight of the Southwest lasts but a few minutes after sundown. As they rounded a point on the high grades, Rex was riding on the outside when, without any warning, his horse plunged headlong to the ground, almost off the edge of the grade.

Nan's horse whirled and reared, as the hills echoed from the crashing report of a rifle. Without hardly knowing what she was doing, Nan dismounted and ran to Rex. He was trying to sit up, looking dazedly around.

Zowee-e-e-e! Another bullet struck the ground beside Nan and went screaming off across the cañon, while the cliffs echoed back the report of the shot. Rex was getting up. His face was skinned and bleeding, and he was still dazed from the fall.

Another bullet whistled past his ear, and he jerked his head back quickly, as if trying to dodge it. Nan grasped him by the arm, and they both slid over the edge of the grade, while the fourth bullet blinded them with a spray of dust and gravel from the roadbed.

To get below the road level was their only chance—and a poor chance! The gravel was loose, sliding. Nan tried to grasp a bush at the edge of the grade, but it slipped from her hand. They were going down the steep slope, unable to check themselves in any way.

Rex was over his daze now, and realized what was happening. He had turned, facing the hill, and dropped to his knees, trying to cling to Nan. They were not sliding fast yet. Nan turned a white face toward him, clutching at the sliding gravel with her hands.

"Turn around!" she said hoarsely. "Sit down and slide!"

He obeyed quickly. They were going faster each moment. Just below them was a small thicket of piñon pines, and unless their speed increased, there might be a chance to slide into that thicket of small trees.

Another bullet snapped past them, and the tip of a piñon was severed. Rex glanced back, trying to see the grade, but the angle was too abrupt. He could see the trail, where the sifting gravel was following them. Then a branch lashed him across the face, a piñon trunk sent him spinning sidewise, and he was through the thicket. His eyes were filled with sand and tears, but he saw Nan a short distance behind him. She had a piñon limb in her hands.

Up to this point the sliding had not been painful. Instead of their sliding over the loose gravel, it seemed to go along with them. There was no more shooting now. Rex managed to slow up sufficiently to half stand, and then to run sidewise across the slope to where he could reach Nan. Her hands were torn

by the piñon branches, and there was a welt across her cheek. She was slightly dazed and hardly realized that their slide was over for a moment.

"What happened?" she asked foolishly.

"I don't know," said Rex, clinging with toes and hands to the loose surface, in order to look back up the slope.

THEY had managed to stop at the edge of a sheer place. Something was coming down the hill toward them. Rex saw it tear through the little thicket above them, fairly knocking down the trees. It was going to pass them at about twenty feet, and as it came down past them, in a cloud of dust and sand, they saw it shoot over the edge just below them and go hurtling off into space.

"That is my huh-horse!" blurted Rex.

Nan nodded, her lips shut tight.

"How do you suppose it got off the road, Nan?"

"The man who shot at us," said Nan, choking back her tears. "He shoved it off the grade. Oh, what are we going to do? We can't get back, Rex."

"And we can't stay here, Nan. This stuff is sliding all the time. That horse went over a precipice. If we could only get around to that other slope."

"Maybe we can."

Off to the left, about a hundred feet away, was another slope, which seemed to lead around and down past the sheer cliffs. It was their only hope. The ground was slowly moving with them.

They got to their feet and began fighting their way toward this slope, climbing upward, trying to keep away from the abrupt drop into the cañon. It was a terrific effort. It was like running on a treadmill.

With another ten feet to go, Nan would never have made it. She fell to her knees, heading down the slope, but Rex still had strength enough to grasp her by the shoulders and swing her around. They both went over the edge of the steep slope.

The dry dust and sand filled their eyes and mouths to the point of suffocation, but luckily the rubble was so soft that they dug deeply into it, impeding their progress to such an extent that they were able to stand up, braced against the hill and work their way down.

Rex clung tightly to Nan. At times they would slip and slide for several feet, but always they were able to keep from pitching headlong. The slide was about two hundred yards long, and they came out in a heavy thicket of fir and small pines, still a long way from the bottom of the cañon.

It was almost dark down there. They looked back up the slope and wondered how they ever came down alive. Above them the sky seemed very blue, but as they sat on a rock and took stock of their injuries the blue sky faded out and a lone star winked down at them.

Both of them were badly bruised and their clothes torn, but luckily no bones were broken. They were covered with dust and sand and altogether miserable.

"I think there is water in the bottom of the cañon," said Nan painfully. "We must get to water, Rex."

"Yes," dully. "I am numb all over, Nan. I don't feel a bit good."

"Have you any matches, Rex?"

He felt carefully through his pockets. Rex did not smoke, but due to the fact that Sleepy was always out of matches he had been carrying a goodly supply.

"Yes, I have some, Nan."

"Good! At least we can keep varmints away from us."

"What is a varmint, Nan?"

"Oh—mountain lions and things like that."

"Down here? And we have no gun."

"Perhaps it is lucky we haven't. I'm not much good with a gun, and if you had one I'd be afraid you might shoot me."

"I suppose that is true, Nan. But do you mean that we are going to spend the night down here?"

"Unless you know of a way out. I don't. I doubt if there is a man in this country who could get out of here at night. We'll just have to make the best of it and be thankful we are alive. Tomorrow, if a

lion don't claw us, or a rattler bite us, we may find a way out."

"You are joking, Nan."

"I'd like to agree with you, Rex. Come on."

TRAVELING over the rocks in the half light was difficult, but they reached the bottom of the cañon with a few extra bruises. There were huge, whitened boulders in the dry bed of the old stream, relics of a day when much water had poured down through Coyote Cañon. From the side of the bank trickled a tiny stream of cold water, and they drank heavily, then built a fire.

It was cold down there, and a wind moaned through the tops of the trees. There was plenty of wood, and they soon had a fire burning in the lee of a big polished boulder. Beyond the illumination of the fire was blackness and the moaning wind. A stone rolled down the slope and crashed through the brush, bringing them both to their feet in a sudden panic.

Rex piled more wood on the fire and they stood together, trying to pierce the darkness.

"I—I guess it—it wasn't anything," faltered Rex.

Nan sat down against the boulder, trying to calm her nerves, while Rex hunched down beside her, poking at the fire with a stick, his ears tuned for the slightest sound.

"I have been wondering who shot at us," he said nervously. "Do you suppose they would follow us down here, Nan?"

"Not down here," she replied. "Nobody would ever come down here voluntarily."

"I suppose not. I know I—"

But Rex did not finish. From out in the blackness came the sound of a mirthless laugh, a devilish chuckle, which caused them to shrink back against the boulder, staring wide into space.

It was not repeated. After a space of perhaps twenty seconds they looked at each other, as if wondering whether the other had heard it. Nan shook her head; she could not speak.

Slowly Rex got to his feet, knees trembling, his hand on Nan's shoulder.

"My God!" he breathed chokingly.

Just across the fire from them, as if appearing from nowhere, stood a man, the firelight glistening on his face. He wore no hat, and his face was gobby with dirt, swollen, contorted. He was wearing a coat, one sleeve of which had been torn away, along with the sleeve of his shirt, which had once been white, but was now stained and dirty.

He was looking at them in a stony sort of way, hunched forward, one hand thrown up, as if to ward away the heat, and in the other hand was a heavy Colt revolver, cocked.

CHAPTER XV

HASHKNIFE'S TELEGRAM HUNCH

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy did not hurry their supper, and it was after dark before they began eating. Hashknife was rather thoughtful, and Sleepy noticed him staring at the table top several times.

"You ain't worryin' about the two kids, are you?" he asked.

"Not exactly worryin' Sleepy, but I wish they had waited until we got back."

"Well, my gosh, there ain't nothin' goin' to hurt 'em."

"I hope not. Better cut that pie."

Sleepy took it from the oven and cut two generous slices, which soon disappeared. But even the apple pie did not serve to raise Hashknife's spirits, and Sleepy laughed at him.

"You look like them pictures of Abe Lincoln, when you get that serious expression," grinned Sleepy. "All you need is some whiskers and a plug hat."

Sleepy slid down in his chair and began rolling a cigaret. He was just running his tongue along the edge of the paper, when something hit him squarely in the face, knocking him over backwards, and he heard the clatter of glass, the thud of a shot.

Hashknife flung himself away from the table, going backwards in his chair, but landed on his hands and knees. His cheek was slightly cut by flying glass from the window, but he did not know it. He sprang to his feet, swept up the rifle that stood in the corner and ran through the living room.

Without hesitation he flung the door open and sprang off the porch. Just out beyond the corral was a horse, going away at a sharp trot, and Hashknife thought he saw a rider on it. He threw up the Winchester and fired twice. The flash of the gun blinded him for a moment, and he was unable to see what had happened, but he could hear the horse no longer.

He ran back in to the house, flinging the rifle aside. Sleepy was still on his back, his feet sticking up over the overturned chair, apparently unconscious.

As quickly as he was able, Hashknife dragged him out of line with the broken window and made an examination. His face was covered with a sticky liquid, and both of his eyes were rapidly turning black. He grunted and sat up.

"What in hell hit me?" he demanded.

"Looks to me as though it was the condensed milk," said Hashknife thankfully.

"Exploded?"

"Yeah—from a bullet."

"Bullet?"

"Somebody tried to spot us through the window, Sleepy."

Sleepy got to his feet, wiping the milk off his face, while Hashknife investigated. The bullet had smashed through the window and riccocheted on the table top, driving the can of condensed milk into Sleepy's face, and had struck the opposite wall.

"Look at m' eyes!" wailed Sleepy, touching them tenderly with his fingers. "Can't hardly see, damn it!"

"You're lucky, cowboy. A few inches higher and you'd be an angel instead of a milkmaid."

"Well, who in hell fired the shot?"

"I'd like to know. You stay here and I'll see what I can find."

SLEEPY got a basin of cold water and began treating his eyes, while Hashknife went outside. He was back in less than five minutes, and with what little vision Sleepy had left he could see that Hashknife was greatly perturbed.

"What do you know?" he asked.

"There's hell to pay, Sleepy. I took a shot at what I thought was the bushwhacker on a horse, and I killed one of Lane's saddle horses—the one Nan said she used. It has got her saddle on it."

"What do you make of that, Hashknife?"

"Somethin' has happened to 'em."

"Mebbe she got throwed. Say, who do you suppose took that shot at us?"

"I wish I knew. They almost got you, pardner."

"They shore condensed me for a moment," grinned Sleepy.

His eyes were swollen almost shut.

"Well, this ain't gettin' us nowhere, Sleepy. You take care of the ranch; I'm headin' for Cañonville."

"Why don't we both go?"

"Try and see yourself in the glass," retorted Hashknife, picking up his hat. "You stay here, cowboy. If anybody comes foolin' around here, use that shotgun on 'em. I'll be back as soon as I can find out somethin'. I may meet 'em on the road."

But Hashknife did not meet anybody on the road. He forced the tall gray over the Coyote Cañon road as fast as he dared in the dark, but he had the road all to himself. He tried to believe that everything was all right with Nan and Rex, but down in his heart he knew something had gone wrong.

IT WAS late when Hashknife drew up at the sheriff's office in Cañonville. He knew that Len slept in his office, and he had little trouble in arousing him.

"Hello, you old son of a gun," greeted Lem sleepily. "Come on in. Wait'll I light the lamp. What brings you here this time of the night?"

"Has Nan Lane and Rex Morgan been here this evenin'?"

"No-o-o, I ain't seen nothin' of 'em, Hashknife."

"Well, they started for here, accordin' to a note they left for us. After we left you, we went to Mesa City, Lem. They must have started out between the time you left us and the time we got back to the ranch. And while we was eatin' supper, somebody shot through the kitchen window and almost got Sleepy. The bullet lifted a can of milk and slammed Sleepy between the eyes with it. I ran outside and I thought I seen a man goin' away; so I shot twice at the object, which turned out to be Nan Lane's saddle horse, still wearin' her saddle. I killed it too dead to kick. Now, what do you make of that, Lem?"

"Well, f'r heaven's sake! Lemme think. Somebody shot through your window? That's bein' tough, ain't it? And was it the horse Nan rode today?"

"There was only two horses in the stable, Lem."

"What do you know? Huh! Well—" Lem picked up his pants and began dressing, his fat face very serious—"I reckon it's up to us to find out somethin', Hashknife. Where could they go? Looks ridiculous, don't it? Who'd want to harm Nan Lane? Say, I took that evidence up with the prosecutor. He says he'll release young Lane as soon as he has a talk with the judge. What did Nan think about it?"

"We never got a chance to tell her."

"Tha-a-at's right. What had we ort to do first? Can't find a thing in the dark. Mebbe we better ride to Mesa City and see what we can see, eh? There ain't no chance for them two folks to get off the main road between here and the Lane ranch. Are you shore they didn't say Mesa City instead of Cañonville?"

"They wrote Cañonville, Lem."

"Well, if they got here, I never did see 'em. I might inquire around a little."

"I don't think that would do any good. They'd come here."

"I could ask Joe Cave. He's livin' at the hotel."

"But you've been here long enough to have seen 'em, Lem. They must have come here behind you; otherwise we would have met 'em on the road between here and the ranch."

"That's right."

Lem buckled on his belt, picked up his rifle and led the way to the stable, where he saddled his horse.

"What do you make of young Morgan, Hashknife?"

"Good kid."

"Iggerant as hell, ain't he?"

"From our point of view, Lem."

"Uh-huh. I hope he ain't to blame for them disappearin'."

"Pshaw!" exploded Hashknife. "He's square as a dollar, Lem. Why, he's civilized."

"That's the hell of it! If he was our kind, we'd know what to expect. Well, let's hit the high spots, *compadre*."

"Speed won't get us nowhere, Lem."

"All right; you lead. I'm the best little follower you ever saw."

THEY rode away from the stable, just as a passenger train roared through the town. They were obliged to wait until the train had gone past, before crossing the tracks. Suddenly Hashknife got an idea.

"Do you know the depot agent very well, Lem?" he asked.

"Shore. Knowed him for a year or so."

"Let's go over and see him."

They tied their horses behind the depot and went around to the little waiting-room. The agent was busy with his telegraph instrument, but he finally turned in his chair and nodded to Lem.

"Hyah, sheriff. What's on your mind?"

"Shake hands with Mr. Hartley, Jim. Hashknife, this is Jim Horton."

They shook hands.

"You tell him what you want, Hashknife," said Lem.

"I dunno whether you can help me or not, Horton. In case a telegram comes for anybody in Mesa City, how do you handle it?"

"Mail it to 'em right away."

"Do you keep any record of telegrams?"

"Oh, sure, we keep a copy. Of course, we never let anybody—"

"If it was orders from the sheriff's office?"

Horton grinned.

"Well, that's different, of course."

"In the last few weeks have you had any telegrams for Peter Morgan?"

"The big cowman who got murdered? Mebbe I did. It seems to me I sent one—lemme see."

He lifted a bulky book to the counter and opened it. The leaves were of yellow tissue, bearing the imprint of telegrams written in copying ink. Swiftly the agent went through the recent imprints. Not many telegrams came to Cañonville.

"There's one," he said, pointing at it, as he swung the book around for them to read.

Hashknife leaned in close and read:

MRS MORGAN PASSED AWAY SUDDENLY AND WAS BURIED LAST SUNDAY STOP TRACED SON TO DEPOT WHERE HE PURCHASED TICKET TO CANONVILLE —J E BLAIR

Lem lifted his head and stared at Hashknife, who was smiling, as he copied the telegram on the back of an envelope.

"What in hell does that mean?" demanded Lem anxiously.

"Looks as though young Morgan was Peter's son, don't it?"

"By golly, it shore does, Hashknife! What made you think to come here and look for a telegram?"

"A hunch."

"I'll be darned. Hunch, eh? Wish I had hunches."

"What is it all about?" asked Horton wonderingly.

"Didn't you do any wonderin' when you got that telegram?" asked Lem.

"I guess I didn't. You see, I don't know anything about Morgan."

"You didn't know he was a bachelor?"

"No. I've heard of him, but I never knew he didn't have a family; so the telegram didn't mean anything to me."

"Well, he never had any wife or a son that we ever heard about. The telegram says that his son was headed this way."

"Did he ever get here, sheriff?"

Lem scratched his head foolishly.

"Well, we dunno yet, Jim. Don't tell anybody about it."

"Is that all I can do for you, gents?" asked Horton.

"Yeah, that's all, I reckon. Thank you, Horton."

"You're welcome."

They walked out of the depot and mounted their horses.

"Well, just keep this information under our hat, Lem," said Hashknife, as they rode away.

"Oh, shore. I may not be worth a damn to find out anythin', but I can keep still about it when somebody else tells me about it."

CHAPTER XVI

NAPOLEON BONAPARTE BRIGGS

FOR WHAT seemed hours Nan and Rex stared across the fire at the man. It was Napoleon Bonaparte Briggs, but they did not know him. His closest friends would have had had difficulty in recognizing him now. His head seemed to have been battered until it was out of shape. His forehead was swollen over his eyes, giving him almost the appearance of a gorilla, and on one side of his head the scalp had been torn loose, disclosing an ugly wound.

His eyes glittered brightly in the firelight, as he swayed on his feet, moving his head slowly, shifting his eyes from Nan to Rex, as if trying to make up his mind just what to do. Rex and Nan seemed incapable of speech. Neither of them had known Briggs. Suddenly his lips parted and he laughed insanely, disclosing two broken front teeth. Rex started to step forward, but the gun muzzle shifted toward him quickly.

"What 'r' you doin' here?" he asked gutturally.

"Somebody shot my horse," said Rex weakly.

"What 'r' you doin' here?" he repeated, as if he had not heard Rex. "Keep back! I'll kill you. I own this place, and I don't allow nobody here."

"We'll go away," said Nan quickly, getting to her feet.

"Woman, eh?"

He laughed foolishly.

"Woman came on my place. Woman and horse meat. Don't move. Woman, horse meat and them damn buzzards. What 'r' you doin' here, I asked you?"

There was no question that the man was insane, dangerously insane. The fire was dying out now. Unconscious of the danger, Rex reached down to pick up a piece of wood, and a bullet smashed the dirt beneath his knuckles. The report of the heavy cartridge echoed back from the cliffs, and Rex almost fell over backward.

"I tell you I'll kill you," declared Briggs. "I own this place, and I don't 'low nobody here."

"Will you let us go away?" asked Nan, hardly speaking above a whisper.

"No! You'd tell somebody where I am. You can't go."

"We wouldn't tell," croaked Rex pleadingly.

"You're a liar! You can't go. I run this place. Don't you try to pick up anythin'."

"Where do you live?" asked Nan.

She wanted to change the subject, to get his mind away from killing some one.

"Never mind where I live. You'll find out soon enough. That's what they all want to know. Everybody asks me where I live, but I don't tell. C'mon."

He backed away from the fire, keeping them covered with the gun.

Away from the firelight the darkness was intense.

"No!" he grunted. "The woman goes first."

Even through his twisted brain was a strain of intelligent cunning, he realized that he could not control both of them in the darkness. He moved back closer to Rex, peering at him closely.

"You stay here," he ordered. "You move and I'll kill you."

"I won't move," promised Rex.

"Don't move. I'll come back for you. If you go away, I'll find you. You can't get away."

He grasped Nan by the shoulder and shoved her ahead of him out into the blackness of the cañon. Rex dropped on his knees beside the fire, piling on more wood. His brain was in a whirl. This crazy man was taking Nan away, and he was letting her go.

In an access of fury at himself Rex flung a stick into the fire, sending up a shower of sparks and for the first time in his life he cursed openly, bitterly. From far up the cañon came the leering laughter of the crazy Briggs.

Then something snapped in the brain of the young man at the fire, and he ran headlong up the cañon, bruising himself against boulders, whipped across the face with branches, falling and swearing at times.

He had lost all sense of reason. After a fall he had picked up a club, and now he went sneaking along, alert to every sound, gripping the club in his right hand, his left hand extended ahead of him, feeling out into the darkness.

GONE was all fear of the darkness, of wild animals. Rex Morgan had reverted to the primitive. Another caveman had stolen his woman, and he was going to get her. On and on he went, climbing boulders, stumbling over exposed roots, until he came to a spot where he could go no further.

In the darkness he discovered that he was at the bottom of what had been an ancient waterfall. There were high banks all around him, but he found a way out. It was a sort of trail up the left bank, twisting between giant boulders.

He reached what seemed to be the cañon level again and sank back on his haunches to listen. Then he heard voices. They were very indistinct, and he strained his ears. The wind whined among the boulders, drowning out the sound, but he thought he had located it.

Gripping his club tightly, he began

working up the slope to the left, under the towering cliffs. It was slow work, this climbing in the darkness. He slipped and sprawled full length on a sloping rock, losing his club, but got back to his knees and kept going up over the ledges.

Then he saw the flicker of a fire, the scent of burning meat. Pulling himself up to the rim of the rock he looked into a cave. In reality he was in the cave himself, as the ledge above him projected twenty feet farther out over the cañon.

Nan was huddled on the floor near the fire, while Briggs towered over her, bulking huge in the firelight. Their shadows were huge, goblinlike things against the wall of the cave. In the fire sizzled a huge hunk of raw meat, which was sending off a strong odor.

Briggs was talking to Nan, but Rex could not hear what was said. Finally Briggs left her and came shambling past where Rex crouched on the rock and disappeared in the darkness. Rex slid off the rock and crossed the entrance of the cave to the fire, and Nan looked up at him wonderingly.

"How did you get here?" she asked.

Rex brushed a hand across his eyes and stared back at the entrance, seeking an answer to her question.

"I—I just came," he said, and squatted down beside the fire.

"He has gone after you, Rex."

"I suppose."

"He'll come back."

Rex stared at her dully.

"Very likely," he said.

"Don't you realize what it means, Rex? The man is crazy. He says he will kill you, because he don't want you here."

"That meat is burning, isn't it?"

"He said it was horse meat. But don't you understand, Rex? That man will come back and kill you."

"No, he won't."

Rex got to his feet and picked up a stone about the size of a baseball, swinging it in his hand to test the weight.

"I'm going to kill him first," he said flatly, and went back toward the opening of the cave.

REX KNEW just where Briggs would pass in entering the cave; so he climbed upon a slab of sandstone, several feet higher than the level of a man's head, and stretched out flat. He was in the deep shadow, but by lifting his head he could see the fire in the cave where Nan still huddled. He turned his head and peered over the outer rim of the rock. Something was moving down there; he could see its dark outline.

It came closer, and he decided that it was the crazy man, sneaking back to the cave. Perhaps, thought Rex, he knows I am here, and is trying to surprise me. Inching carefully forward, he swung up his arm and sent the heavy stone crashing downward, where it thudded against some yielding object.

Came a spitting snarl, the rasp of claws on sandstone, and the object vanished down the cañon. Rex realized instantly that he had hit an animal instead of a man, because that snarl never came from a human throat. The animal was a mountain lion.

But now Rex was without a weapon of any kind. He slid off the sandstone shelf and went back toward the firelight, trying to pick up another stone. The lion had probably been attracted by the smell of the meat and was stalking the cave.

Rex secured another stone and turned back toward the shelf. He heard the man coming back, talking to himself. It was too late for Rex to regain the shelf, so he darted in beside a small ledge, crouching as low as possible.

He heard the scuff of leather soles on the rock, as Briggs came cautiously. Then he saw the huge bulk of the man pass him, going slowly, evidently peering into the cave, trying to see if everything was all right.

Rex straightened up, drew back his arm and flung the stone. But it slipped from his hand and crashed against the wall, far to the right of its victim, and Briggs whirled quickly, grunting with astonishment.

But Rex did not wait to see whether he

missed. As he flung the stone, he also flung himself forward, locking both arms around Briggs, and his rush carried enough weight to send Briggs to his knees against the sandstone wall of the cave.

The heavy revolver went spinning across the stony floor, and the two men surged to their feet, only to crash down again, fighting with tooth and nail, but silently.

Although Briggs was past middle age, he was as strong as any man in the country, and his strength, added to his insane fury, would have made him a match for a professional wrestler. Rex was not particularly strong, but he was fighting for his life and for the life of Nan Lane, and he clung to Briggs like a burr.

He had his left arm around Brigg's neck, his right locked beneath Brigg's right armpit, the while his knees dug into the small of Brigg's back. Briggs managed to get hold of Rex's left ankle with his left hand, but Rex promptly locked his other leg around Brigg's waist, spurring him in the stomach.

Rex's grip around Brigg's neck was shutting off his wind; so he let loose of the ankle, using both hands to tear Rex's arm away from his throat.

It gave Rex a chance to release the right arm, but before he could do anything, Briggs had caught his left wrist with his left hand, reached back with his right, grasping Rex's shoulder, and flung him ten feet away.

Rex landed on one knee, his left arm numb to the shoulder. For several moments Briggs stood there, trying to get his balance. Perhaps his disordered brain caused him to forget what was happening for a moment.

Rex had got back to his feet now and was silhouetted against the light from the fire.

Nan had heard the scuffle and was trying to see what it meant. Then Briggs laughed harshly and started toward Rex, who began backing toward the fire. He did not care to get caught again in those viselike hands.

BRIGGS did not hurry. Perhaps he realized that Rex could not escape him, and was playing with him. Nan uttered no sound, as the two men came into the firelight. Rex's shirt had been almost torn from his body and one cheek was bleeding from a rasping contact with the wall of the cave.

Rex glanced behind him. He could not go much farther. He tried to edge to the left, but Briggs blocked him. It was only a matter of moments before he would be caught. Suddenly he remembered the gun.

"Nan—the gun!" he panted. "Near the entrance—he dropped it, Nan!"

Briggs shifted his eyes to Nan. He was close enough to stop her if she started. But as he shifted his eyes Rex sprang to the side of the cave, trying to get past Briggs.

He was not successful. As quick as a flash Briggs reached out and caught part of Rex's torn sleeve. Rex tried to back away, but the cave wall was too close. Briggs was slightly crouched, and as he yanked Rex toward him, the young man struck with every ounce of his body in a sweeping uppercut, which caught Briggs flush on the point of the chin.

Briggs' head snapped back, his heel caught on a stone, and he fell flat on his back, his head fairly bouncing on the sandstone floor.

Rex fell to his knees from the force of his blow, his right arm and hand paralyzed for the moment, but he got to his feet and staggered out to the entrance, where he found the gun. Nan was sitting against the wall, crying, as he came back, and he looked at her curiously. Briggs had not moved.

Rex picked up some scattered wood and threw it on the fire.

"This is a better place than we were, Nan," he said calmly. "At least we have a roof over our heads."

She took her hands from her face and stared at him. It was such a ridiculous thing to say after what had happened.

"Rex, are you all right?" she whispered.

He looked at her and grinned.

"You're damn' right! Isn't that what Hashknife would say?"

"Oh, I'm glad, Rex. I don't know what to say. It is all like an awful dream. I thought you had lost your mind, too."

"Me?" Rex blinked some of the blood out of his eye. "Perhaps I did, Nan. I don't remember much about it. But I was sane enough to realize that he would kill me. I guess I missed him, with the stone. I wonder whether I killed him."

Cautiously he examined Briggs. The man's heart was beating, but he was unconscious. The blow on the jaw and the drop to the stone had given him a double knockout.

"He's not dead, Nan. I'm glad of that."

"But what will we do when he wakes up, Rex?"

"That depends on him entirely. If he still persists in trying to be boss of this place, I shall shoot him with his own gun."

"Let me see that gun, Rex."

He handed it to her and she looked it over carefully.

"Every cartridge has been fired," she said wonderingly.

"You mean it is of no value?"

"Not unless he has more cartridges in his pockets."

Briggs was wearing no belt, and a search of his pockets failed to show any ammunition.

"Give me the gun," said Rex. "I can bluff with it."

"But he must know it is empty, Rex."

"If he did, why was he carrying it? You try and get a little sleep, Nan; I'll watch him. If he wasn't born in this cañon, there must be a way out, and we'll find it. That meat don't make a very pleasant odor, does it."

"He was cooking it for me," said Nan. "He said it was horse meat. He picked it up off the dirty floor and threw it on the fire—for my supper."

"He may be hungry when he wakes up," grinned Rex.

CHAPTER XVII

A DRUNKEN DEPUTY

IT WAS well after midnight when Hashknife and the sheriff reached Mesa City. The town was in darkness, except the Oasis Saloon, where they found only Dave Morgan and Jack Fairweather, discussing business, while the bartender rested his elbows on the bar, as he perused a dog eared book.

Morgan welcomed the newcomers heartily.

"C'mon and have a drink. You fellers ridin' kinda late, ain't you?"

"Kinda," admitted Lem, as they lined up at the bar. "What's new, Dave?"

"Nothin' much. I'm takin' over this saloon, Lem."

"Yea-a-ah? Oh, shore. You goin' to stay here, Jack?"

Fairweather shook his head slowly.

"You goin' to run this place yourself, Dave?"

"I don't hardly think so, Lem. May sell it after while."

"Where's the boys from the 6X6?" asked Hashknife?

"Gone to bed, I reckon. Got pretty well loaded, all of 'em."

"You boys just rode in from Cañonville?" asked Fairweather.

Lem nodded, lifting his glass.

"Here's how, gents."

They drank together.

"You goin' to the ranch with me, Lem?" asked Hashknife.

"I think I'll stay here, Hashknife. I'll get a room at the hotel and be out to your place early."

"All right."

Hashknife went back to his horse, mounted and headed for the ranch, while the three men at the bar had another drink.

"You ain't takin' an after midnight ride just for your health, are you, Lem?" queried Morgan.

The sheriff rolled a cigaret, shaping it carefully, before replying:

"Nan Lane and that young tenderfoot

started for Cañonville late this afternoon, and they never arrived."

"Never arrived? What do you mean, Lem?"

"Never arrived, thasall. Her horse came back to Lane's ranch, and Hashknife killed it."

"Killed what—the horse?"

"Shore."

"What for?"

"Thought there was a man on it—the man who had just shot through the window at them."

"Well, I'll be damned!" exploded Dave. "What's this all about?"

"Search me," replied Lem wearily, as he lighted his cigaret.

"Did either of 'em get hit, Lem?"

"No-o-o, not exactly. The bullet hit their can of milk, and the can hit Stevens between the eyes."

"Can you imagine that? And you say that Miss Lane and the tenderfoot never got to Cañonville?"

"So far as we know, they never did."

"But where are they?"

"Dave," said Lem seriously, "I'm no mind reader. I dunno a thing about it. I'm follerin' Hartley, thasall. He says he's got a hunch—and that's more 'n I've got. Let's have one more drink."

The bartender served them and they drank silently.

"Dave, did you ever hear Pete say anythin' about havin' a woman?" asked Lem.

"About havin' a woman?"

"Yeah—a wife."

"Where didja ever get that idea, Lem?"

"Oh, I jist wondered."

"Funny ideas you get, Lem. Did you ever hear of him havin' a wife?"

"Nope."

"I never did," said Fairweather. "I don't think he ever did, unless he was married before he came to this country."

"What ever put that idea in your mind?" persisted Dave.

"Oh, I dunno. Mebbe it was that tenderfoot. His name's Morgan, and he came here, tryin' to find out who sent a check to his mother. It came from Mesa City, he says."

"He's crazy," laughed Dave. "Anyway, he'd have a hard time provin' anythin'. His mother's dead and Pete's dead, and how in hell could he prove anythin'? Let's have another drink."

"I guess you've right, Dave. No, thanks, I've had enough. Better grab a little sleep."

"What does Hartley think about it, Lem?"

"Well, he don't say much, except when I get an idea, and then he shows me where I'm all wrong. If I had his brains, I wouldn't be sheriff of no county, I'll tell you that much."

Lem left the saloon and took his horse to the livery-stable.

HASHKNIFE rode straight back to the ranch and stabled his horse. Sleepy was still awake and anxious to know what Hashknife had discovered, so he came down to the stable.

"But where can they be?" wondered Sleepy.

"I'm shore stuck," said Hashknife gloomily. "This is the worst danged case I ever worked on. I can't seem to get goin'. But, by golly, I'm—" Hashknife hesitated.

The moon was high up over the hills, illuminating the old buildings and corrals.

Hashknife walked away from Sleepy and stopped beside the corral fence, only a few feet away.

The Navaho rug was not on the fence.

"It was there when we came in this evenin'," said Sleepy. "I remember seein' it, Hashknife."

"I remember it, too, Sleepy. Let's go to bed."

"I used some raw meat on my eyes," offered Sleepy. "I can see clearer than I could."

"I can see better now, too," said Hashknife meaningly.

But Sleepy did not question him.

JOE CAVE, deputy sheriff, was very drunk. He leaned on a saloon bar in Cañonville and gazed gloomily about the place, where a lone bartender polished

glassware and busied himself with mop and water bucket.

It was too early in the morning for much activity. In fact, it was rather out of the ordinary for any one to be drunk that early in the morning. Joe's tow colored hair had not been brushed, and he looked as if he had slept in his clothes. His thin lips parted over his prominent front teeth, known as "buck-teeth," as he indulged in a foolish grin.

"Whazzametter round here?" he demanded.

The bartender studied him gravely. He hated to see a man drunk so early in the morning.

"I don't see anything the matter," he replied shortly.

"Zasso?" Joe yawned foolishly.

He was wearing a once yellow shirt, a nearly red muffler around his scrawny neck, and his overalls were so tight that one knee had split over a too prominent knee cap. Joe's boots were run over on the outside of the heels, causing him to be knock kneed. He wore a holstered gun, and the loops of his belt were full of cartridges.

Failing to strike up a conversation, Joe left that saloon and went down the street to another place, where he found conditions much the same.

"Where's the sheriff?" asked the bartender.

"Dunno. Went away last night."

"And so you went and got drunk, eh? Lem will jist about kick you off the job when he comes back."

"Zasso? Huh! Let 'm kick. I don't like thish job. Nawthin' to do but feed pris'ners. T' the devil with it. Gimme a drink."

Joe got his drink and went to the next saloon. It seemed that he was making the rounds and still going strong when Hashknife, Sleepy and the sheriff rode in and went to the office. The office and jail were in the same building, and in fact the sheriff's office was the main entrance to the jail.

Sleepy's eyes were still of a decidedly mauve hue, but the swelling was gone and he was able to see. Lem had come to the ranch at daylight, and the three of them had headed for Cañonville. They had tried to read the signs along the Coyote Cañon road, but the ground was so hard that they were unable to distinguish one track from another.

THE THREE men entered the office, which was unlocked, and Lem swore roundly when he did not find Joe Cave there. It was against the rules to leave the place unlocked. Lem opened the barred door at the rear of the office and went down the narrow corridor between the cells.

Old Paul Lane called a cheery good morning to him. Young Lane wanted to know how soon he was to be turned loose.

"I hope to get you out today, son. How's everything'?"

"All right, if we had some breakfast."

"Ain't you had no breakfast yet? Where's Joe?"

"He ain't been in here this mornin'. I think he came to the office, but he didn't come in here."

"Well, that's a fine deal, folks. I'll get your grub right away."

Lem told Hashknife and Sleepy to hold down the office while he went to the restaurant.

"Go in and talk to 'em," he said. "They been askin' about you. But don't mention anythin' about Nan bein' missin'."

Old Paul Lane shook hands with them through the bars, and the son thanked Hashknife for what he had done to secure evidence that he had not shot Ben Leach.

"We been wonderin' why Nan didn't come to see us," said the old man wistfully.

"She's been awful busy," said Hashknife quickly. "Keeps her busy cookin' for three of us."

"I imagine that's right, Hartley."

"Well, I'll soon be out," said Long Lane thankfully. "You ain't been bothered with any of the 6X6 outfit, have you?"

"They've quit the 6X6. Dave Morgan has taken charge of the ranch."

"The devil he has!"

"And of the Oasis Saloon, too."

"I've been worryin' about Nan," confessed the old man. "But Lem says she's safe as long as you boys are with her. I'm shore much obliged to both of you. How about the tenderfoot?"

"Oh, he's still alive," smiled Hashknife, wondering down in his heart whether this was the truth.

"He's lucky," smiled Lane. "He done me a good turn—two of 'em. It's funny what a green kid will do thataway."

"I was just wonderin' why Joe Cave didn't bring you any breakfast, said Hashknife.

"I dunno. Usually brings it about eight o'clock. He was kinda snappy last night, when he brought our supper. Somebody rubbed him the wrong way yesterday."

"Yeah?"

"I think so. We didn't hear much of it, because the door was almost shut, but there was some kind of an argument."

"Who was he arguin' with?" asked Hashknife.

"We dunno, but we heard Joe say, 'Well, don't blame me. That was your fault,' and after a few moments he said, 'By God, that was the agreement, and you better stick to it.' Then there was quite a while that we can't hear anythin', except a word once in a while, but before they quit talkin', we heard Joe say, 'That's the way I'm goin' to work it, and you better stick to your word.' Afterwards, when Joe brought in our supper, he was mad about somethin', and wouldn't talk to us."

"Was he arguin' with Lem?" asked Hashknife.

"I dunno who the other person was."

A FEW minutes later Lem brought in their breakfast and, while they were eating, Joe Cave came to the office. He leaned against the side of the doorway and leered at the men in the corridor

Lem walked out to him, looked him over carefully, his face registering disgust.

"Drunk as a boiled owl, eh?"

"Whazzamatter with you?" grunted Joe.

"What's the matter with me? I'll tell you what's the matter with me. I'm through with you, Joe."

Lem reached over and unpinned the star from Joe's vest, while Joe looked at him owlishly.

"Go and sober up," said Lem coldly, "and then come back here and I'll give you an order on the county for your salary."

"Fired, eh?" queried Joe.

"You're right! I don't want a drunken deputy around here, forgettin' to feed the prisoners and leavin' the jail unlocked. Get away from here, before I flatten your nose."

"A-a-a-aw right!"

Joe surged away from the doorway and went to the edge of the sidewalk, where he balanced drunkenly for several moments, and then headed his erratic way toward the livery-stable.

Lem snorted with disgust and turned from the doorway, but Hashknife watched him disappear through the wide door of the stable.

"Gone after his horse?" asked Hashknife.

"He'll probably head for Mesa City, the drunken bum," said Lem.

Hashknife stepped outside, but turned to Lem and Sleepy.

"Wait here for me," he said quickly, and hurried out to his horse.

Lem and Sleepy came to the door and watched Hashknife ride out of town, going north.

"What struck him so sudden?" wondered Lem.

"I dunno," grinned Sleepy. "He's thataway, Lem."

About five minutes later Joe Cave came from the stable, riding a chunky bay gelding. He swayed drunkenly in his saddle, as he rode up the main street of the town, also heading north.

LEM WAS carrying the breakfast dishes back to the restaurant when Hashknife rode back to the front of the office. He did not explain where he had been or why he had gone, but as he waited for Lem to come back from the restaurant, Sleepy heard Hashknife singing softly:

"I know a girl down Pecos wa-a-ay,
And I'm goin' to marry her some da-a-ay.
Her pa's in jail and can't get bail;
They rode her ma out of town on a ra-a-ail.
Her lips are red and her hair is black;
She shot the sheriff in the ba-a-ack.
Oh, how my heart for her does pi-i-ine,
'Cause she's my little clingin' vi-i-ine."

Sleepy knew the symptoms. It was not often that Hashknife sang. He was not at all musical. Just now he was deadly serious, and it is doubtful whether he realized that he was singing.

"Feelin' good, cowboy?" asked Sleepy.

Hashknife looked at him quickly.

"Yeah, I feel pretty good, Sleepy."

Lem came back from the restaurant. He didn't ask Hashknife where he had been.

"Get on your horse," said Hashknife. "We're goin' to Mesa City."

They mounted and rode away, after Lem had locked the office door. At the upper end of the street they met Bunty Smith, and Lem drew up his horse.

"Goin' to be here all day, Bunty?" he asked.

"Shore am, Lem."

"Here's the key to my office. If I ain't back by five o'clock, I wish you'd feed my prisoners, Bunty."

"Glad to do it, Lem. What do you know?"

"I don't know a thing, Bunty. See you later."

They rode back along the mesa to the Coyote Cañon grades, riding swiftly until they started climbing. It was a long, slow climb to where the grades flattened out around the cañon. They met the stage coming from Mesa City. The driver was a man from south of Cañonville. He nodded pleasantly, as they crowded their horses against the inner bank to let the stage pass.

"Joe Cave used to drive stage, didn't he?" asked Hashknife.

"For a long time," replied Lem. "Been here a long time. Used to work for the 6X6. Worked for the Flying M, too. I thought he'd make a good deputy, but I was wrong. Good shot, Joe is. I've seen him shoot. Fast with a gun."

Lem spoke jerkily. He was too fat to ride fast. Suddenly Hashknife drew up his horse and looked down into the cañon. A flock of perhaps fifty buzzards were circling below them; floating without apparent effort. They could look down on their backs from the grade. They were apparently keeping to a certain level.

"Quite a flock of buzzards," observed Lem. "Probably a lion killed a deer down there, and they want their share. Lots of lions down there, Hashknife. Rocks full of 'em. Notice the way them buzzards act? Probably the lion chased 'em away."

"Uh-huh," grunted Hashknife. "It's a wonder that deer would go down in that cañon, Lem."

"Water. They probably come from out on the mesa. Not very much water for 'em out there. Hard trip, I reckon. I never been in the cañon. Probably a way in, if you know where to look."

"Probably."

They rode on toward Mesa City.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MASKED MAN

THAT night was years long to Nan and Rex. She slept fitfully, but Rex did not sleep at all. Briggs had not moved. At times he groaned softly, and several times he babbled incoherently. There was plenty of wood, and Rex kept the fire going briskly.

It was fully daylight before Rex moved from the fire. He was stiff and sore in every joint. His left shoulder pained him greatly, and his right hand was badly swollen. Nan followed him out to the mouth of the cave. She limped as badly

as he, and together they stood on the sandstone ledge, looking up at the sunlight on the high peaks.

"It won't shine down here much before noon," she said, placing a hand on his shoulder. "This cañon is so deep that the sun doesn't reach it quickly."

Rex nodded gloomily.

"What a night! And what next? I'm so hungry I could almost eat that piece of burned horse meat."

"Same here," Nan tried to smile, "but we'll have to go without food, I suppose. Which way was that spring?"

"Down there." Rex pointed to the right. "I wonder whether my old hat will hold water? I believe it will, Nan. You stay here and I'll bring you some."

He made his way down among the boulders, sliding the last few feet to the bottom of the cañon, where he picked up a sizeable club. His steps made little sound in the yielding sand, as he made his way down the bottom to where he circled the big boulder, where they had built their fire.

Clustered around the little spring were dozens of quail, getting their morning drink. Rex did not know what they were, except that they were birds, and perhaps food. They had probably never before seen a human being, because they merely squatted and looked at him. With a side swing of his hand he flung the club at them, killing three and sending the rest in a whirring, curving flight down the cañon.

He secured his birds, filled his hat with water and started on his return journey to the cave. Nan danced with joy at the sight of the three birds.

"I didn't know what they were," confessed Rex, "but they looked good to eat, so I hit them with a club."

Nan skinned the birds and went back in to the cave where Rex had built up the fire. Briggs had not moved yet, and Rex was afraid he was dead, but the old man muttered brokenly as Rex leaned over him.

He did not look so formidable now—more like an oldish man who had been badly mistreated. It seemed that his head had been battered until it was all out of shape.

"He is wearing a dress shirt," said Rex. "Isn't it queer for a man down here to be wearing a stiff bosom shirt? Did you ever see him before, Nan?"

"No, I never have. See if you can find us a couple of green sticks, Rex, about a yard long and as big as your finger, to broil these quail on."

"But what are we going to do with this man, Nan? He's in awful bad shape. Shouldn't we tie him up, or something?"

"I don't know, Rex. We haven't any ropes. Oh, I don't think he can hurt anybody. He's just an old man."

REX SECURED the sticks and came back to the entrance of the cave, where he stopped and looked at the sky. The buzzards were coming for their breakfast, a whole cloud of them, zooming down, like a great fleet of black airplanes. Rex called Nan to the entrance to watch the birds. Some of them sailed within a few yards of them, croaking harshly. One tried to alight on the sandstone shelf, where Rex had wasted his stone on a lion, but it caught sight of the two human beings and went away with a great flapping of wings.

Their objective seemed to be just across the cañon from the cave.

"Horrid, dirty things!" exclaimed Nan, "Always looking for carrion."

"I suppose," sighed Rex. "Still, they might be our salvation, Nan. I remember what Hashknife said to me the night we found that horse. He said, 'Sometimes it's a good thing to follow the buzzards. You never can tell what you might find.' "

"But do you suppose he might see the buzzards down here?"

"He might see them as they come down, Nan. He'll know today that we never reached Cañonville, and he will start a search."

"Oh, I hope so, Rex. But after breakfast we'll see if there isn't a way out of here. Come on and help cook it."

They each ate a half cooked quail. Without any seasoning it was far from delicious, but they ate it and pronounced it good.

"I think you are a very brave girl, Nan," said Rex. "In fact, you are rather wonderful in every way, but you've got a lot of burned quail on your nose and a black smudge on one cheek. I suppose I'm a sight. But I don't really care, do you?"

"I don't care how you look, Rex."

"Well, that's fine. Now, I think we better look around and see whether there isn't a way out."

They worked their way down through the brush and crossed the bottom of the cañon above the cave, where they were able to climb to a wide shelf. It was here that they disturbed the buzzard host, and the birds went flapping and croaking their way up the side of the cliffs, only to soar in vast circles, halfway up the height of the cañon, watching with their keen eyes for the two human beings to disappear.

It was this flight of buzzards that Hashknife, Sleepy and Lem saw from the grades.

"They were eating a horse!" exclaimed Nan. "Why, your horse never fell this high up the cañon, Rex."

They walked over and inspected the almost obliterated carcass of a horse, which still bore a saddle. It had been a roan horse, and a strip of the skin still bore the brand of the 6X6.

"That was one of Peter Morgan's horses," declared Nan. "But how in the world did it get down here?"

Rex looked critically up the side of the sheer hillside.

"It surely didn't walk down," he replied. "I think it must have come down like my horse did—end over end."

"Well, I don't like the odor," said Nan finally. "Let's see if we can't go down the cañon."

IN THE meantime, Hashknife, Sleepy and Lem rode on to Mesa City. Spike Cahill and Bert Roddy met them at the hitchrack, and from their general appearance those two were not feeling so good as they had the evening before.

"What's all this talk about Miss Lane and the tenderfoot disappearin'?" asked Spike. "Lotsa folks have been talkin' about it, and we want it straight."

Lem explained as well as he could.

"Ain't showed up yet?" Bert Roddy shook his head painfully.

"Not yet, Bert."

"Well, I'll be jiggered! Whatcha suppose became of 'em, Lem?"

"Nobody knows."

"Did Joe Cave show up here?" asked Hashknife.

"About an hour ago," said Spike, spitting dryly. "Quit his job, didn't he?" looking at Lem.

"I fired him," said Lem.

"I told you!" crowed Bert. "Didn't I offer to make you a bet, Spike? I said that Lem canned him, didn't I?"

"A-a-aw, don't brag; you make my head ache."

"Where's Joe now?" asked Hashknife.

"Gone out to the Flyin' M. Dave Morgan hired him and sent him right out to the ranch. Dave needs men pretty bad. He even offered to take us back agin', didn't he, Bert?"

"Shore did. And you tell 'em what I told him, Spike."

"Aw, it wasn't so smart. We need the job."

"Not for that sidewinder. He jist the same as accused us of openin' the safe at the 6X6. I may be a thief, but I don't like to have it told before my friends."

"That's right; he did insult us, Bert. I'm glad you said what you did to him. But—" he turned to Lem—"what are you doin' toward findin' the lost folks?"

"Not a thing—yet."

They all walked over to the Oasis, where they found Dave Morgan and several more men.

"What's the latest news?" asked Morgan.

They were obliged to tell him that there was nothing new.

"You know this country pretty well, don't you, Morgan?" asked Hashknife.

Dave Morgan smiled faintly, fingering his watch chain.

"I ought to," he said. "I've been here a long time."

"Ever been down in the middle of Coyote Cañon?"

Morgan blinked quickly, thoughtfully.

"No, I never have, Hartley."

"Do you know if there's a trail down there?"

"I've never heard of any."

"I never have either," said Spike. "Why that thing is straight up and down. Talkin' about it makes me thirsty; so we better have a drink. The 6X6 owes me some money, anyway."

"And you're goin' to collect it over the bar, eh?" queried Dell Bowen.

"Aw, don't preach. You spent part of yours last night."

"What about a trail into Coyote Cañon?" asked Morgan.

"I'd like to go down there," replied Hashknife.

"You think there's somethin' down there?" asked Spike.

"About a hundred buzzards," smiled Sleepy, accepting a glass from the bartender.

"Buzzards, eh? Somethin' dead, eh?"'

"No, they go down there to eat brush," said Bert sarcastically.

"You're comical," said Spike admiringly. "The only thing that keeps you off the stage is the fact that you can't drive, and they wouldn't trust you with the money box."

"Nobody interested in your comedy, Spike," assured Bowen. "We want to know more about Coyote Cañon. Hartley, are you serious in wantin' to go down there?"

"I'm goin' down," declared Hashknife.

"You don't suppose that Nan Lane and that fool kid are down there, do you?"

Hashknife studied his glass of liquor for a moment.

"Bowen," he said slowly, "I don't know, but there's no other place to look. They never got to Cañonville; they never came home. Nan's horse came back. They either went up or down, and I'm bettin' they went down."

"But why should they, Hartley?"

"Who knows? I'm playin' the buzzards, Bowen."

"Uh-huh," thoughtfully. "Well, it's a good bet. We'll go with you, cowboy. I don't know a trail down there, but we'll find one. It's worth a try. When do we start?"

"Right now."

"Saddle up!" snorted Spike, sending his glass spinning down the bar. "C'mon."

"You might get in off the mesa on the lower end," called Dave Morgan. "They tell me the deer come in that way."

"All right, Dave, thanks," replied the sheriff.

THE THREE cowboys hurried to the livery stable, where they saddled their horses. Hashknife, Sleepy and Lem joined them, and the six men rode out of town together. Lem and Hashknife rode knee to knee.

"We better try the cañon jist south of the Lane place," called Bowen. "It ain't so high there."

"Suits me," agreed Lem heartily.

He had little hopes of ever getting to the bottom of the cañon, no matter where they tried a descent.

A quarter of a mile away from town, Hashknife halted them.

"Boys, I want you to do me a little favor," he said. "Go right ahead and try to get down the cañon."

"What's the idea, Hashknife?" queries Lem wonderingly.

"I can't tell you yet, Lem. It's just a hunch. I'm turnin' back here."

"Let him go," said Sleepy quickly. "It's all in the game."

"All right," agreed Lem, holding out his hand. "Good luck, Hashknife."

They swung their horses around and rode swiftly southward, while Hashknife went back toward Mesa City again. Just outside the town he halted his horse behind a thicket of mesquite and dismounted.

He had not been there over five

minutes, when Dave Morgan rode past, his horse traveling at a swinging walk. As far as Hashknife knew, Morgan was merely heading for the 6X6 ranch. But as soon as he passed a turn in the road, Hashknife mounted and followed him.

For possibly half a mile farther Morgan rode slowly, but finally forced his horse to a gallop. Hashknife kept far enough behind him so that Morgan would not see or hear him, and from a slight elevation he saw Morgan swing to the 6X6 road.

Hashknife swore under his breath, but followed, and it was with a great deal of satisfaction that he saw Morgan leave the road, possibly a quarter of a mile from the forks, and travel south down a brushy swale.

It was rather difficult for Hashknife to follow without being seen now, but he was obliged to take a chance, in order to keep Morgan in sight. Morgan did not look back, but seemed intent on his destination.

It was a little over a mile from where Morgan left the road to the rim of Coyote Cañon, and Hashknife was not over two hundred yards to the left of him, shielded by a mesquite thicket, when Morgan reached the rim.

For several minutes Morgan sat his horse, scanning the cañon, as if satisfying himself that no one was in sight. Hashknife was a little afraid that the five men farther down the cañon might interfere with things, but finally, Morgan, evidently satisfied, rode his horse over the rim of the cañon, cutting in between two live-oaks, and disappeared.

Hashknife rode cautiously to the rim, behind the oaks, and dismounted. Here were the marks of Morgan's horse in the loose earth, and for quite a distance down the slope he could see where the horse had sidled along the steep slope.

Calmly he rolled and smoked a cigaret. He was not in such a hurry now. If Morgan could get down, he could. And he did not want to try the descent while there was danger of Morgan's hearing him come down. Finally he tightened his cinch, mounted and followed Morgan.

NAN AND Rex wandered down the cañon below where they had first entered it, but were unable to find a way out. After a supreme effort they were able to climb back over the rocks to where the slide ended. They were unable to go any farther.

"It doesn't look very promising," said Rex wearily.

Nan sat on a rock, tired out from the climb. She realized better than Rex did what they were up against. Unless help came to them, they were doomed to starvation in the bottom of Coyote Cañon. She knew that it was only through great luck that Rex had been able to kill those quail.

"If we even had a gun," she said helplessly, "perhaps they could hear the echo of it."

"But there must be a way out," insisted Rex. "It seems to be an impassable pocket, but there must be a way."

"I almost wish we were buzzards," he said. "They are able to fly out with scarcely any effort."

"They are not the only buzzards in this country," said Nan.

"You mean—human buzzards?"

"Yes. Whoever shot your horse must know we are down here. They don't know whether we are alive or dead. How did the crazy man get down here, I wonder? That must be his horse."

"Yes, it is all very queer. I wonder if he is still alive? Perhaps he knows a way out, Nan. It seems a brutal thing to leave him up there alone in that cave. But what can we do? At least, he is unconscious and does not seem to be suffering. But I wish he would wake up sane again, because he might know a way out."

"He wouldn't know. I guess we better go back to the cave and gather a supply of wood. All we can do is to pray that some one will look down here for us."

They went back to the bottom of the cañon and had a drink at the little spring. A copper colored rattler, stretched out on the top of a boulder, waiting for the sunshine, looked them over with beady eyes,

as they went past. They did not see the snake, and the snake was too torpid from the cold to sound a warning.

They climbed up from the bottom of the cañon near the old waterfall and twisted their way around the huge boulders. Nan was in the lead, and as she circled an outcropping of sandstone she cried out sharply and stepped back, bumping Rex sidewise.

A man was standing against the sandstone, covering them with a rifle, and so close was he that Nan's elbow struck the barrel of the rifle, as she jerked back. Her first impression was that it was the crazy man, but a second glance dissipated this idea.

THE MAN was masked with a big bandanna handkerchief, with jagged eyeholes, and his slouch hat was pulled low over his forehead. For several moments he did not move or speak. Rex put his arms around Nan, and tried to draw her behind him.

"Don't move," warned the man harshly.

"Who are you?" demanded Rex.

"Ne'mind who I am. Keep your hands up and foller me."

He backed slowly to the open hillside below the cave, which was not visible from there. Rex had shoved the empty revolver inside the waist band of his trousers, and now the man stepped over and yanked it away. A quick glance showed him that the gun was empty.

"Where'd you git that?" he asked.

"I found it," lied Rex.

"Uh-huh."

The man flung it far off down the cañon.

"How did you git down here?" he asked.

Rex explained.

"You came all the way down that side, eh?"

"It was quite a slide," agreed Rex. "Now, I hope you will show us the way out."

"You hope so, do you? Who shot your horse up there?"

"We haven't any idea."

"Anybody gunnin' for you?"

"I don't know why they should."

The man had a lariat wrapped around his waist and now he began unwrapping it.

"We just want to find the way out of here," said Rex.

"Thasso?"

The man seemed amused. He shifted his gaze to Nan.

"Set down on the rock!" he snapped harshly. "Set down there and set still." He shook the last coil of the rope loose, catching the hondo and quickly making his loop. Neither of them had any idea what he was intending to do. He flipped the twist out of the loop, and with a jerk of his wrist he flung the loop over Rex's shoulders, yanking it tight. Rex stumbled forward, his arms cinched to his sides, and the man kicked his feet from under him, throwing him heavily.

"Stay there, damn yuh!" he snarled. He gave Nan a sharp glance. She had jumped to her feet now, as if intending to help Rex.

"You stay put!" warned the man. "Set down there!"

NAN SANK back on the rock and watched the man deftly hogtie Rex. He knew ropes, and in a few moments Rex was completely helpless.

"I reckon that'll hold you," said the man.

"But what has he ever done to you?" asked Nan. "Why are you tying him up? He never harmed you."

"Who's doin' this? Keep your face out of it."

"But why are you tying him up?" persisted Nan. "He never harmed you. All we want is a chance to get out of here."

She left the rock and came close to him. He watched her through the jagged slips in the handkerchief.

"Keep away from me," he growled. "I never hit no woman. Never thought a man ort to hit a woman. But I got to protect myself."

"Oh, I'm not going to fight with you," wearily. "I just want to explain things."

"Yeah? You set down. I've gotta figure out somethin'."

"But won't you let him go—please."

"I can't! Set down. If I had another rope, I'd tie you, too."

Nan sat down, while the man perched on a convenient boulder. Rex was lying on his side, facing them. He was bewildered and unable to move. The man in the mask rolled a cigaret, but discovered that he would have to move his mask aside in order to smoke, and tossed the unlighted cigaret aside.

He made no mention of the cave, and Nan decided that he had not discovered it. For possibly five minutes they sat there silently. At times the man leaned forward, rubbing his face through the handkerchief, as if unable to arrive at a decision. At times he turned his head and looked at the buzzards, which were circling about. Finally he got to his feet, walked over and looked at the knotted rope and then turned to Nan.

"I'm goin' to take you out," he said.

"Goin to take me out?" Nan got to her feet quickly. "What about him?" pointing at Rex.

The man shook his head.

"He stays."

"But we can't leave him here alone."

"The hell we can't? What'll stop us?"

"Why, he will die. Don't you understand? We can't leave him there."

"He stays, do you *sabe* that? I'll take you out."

"Go ahead, Nan," panted Rex. "You—you can tell where I am, don't you see?"

"A lot of good it'll do," laughed the man.

He pointed at the circling buzzards meaningly. Nan knew what he meant, and her face went white.

"I won't go without him," she said firmly.

"You won't? Well, I'll declare! What's the idea? Are you—aw, have a little sense, can'tcha? No use of both of you cashin' in down here. I'm willin' to take you out, and you act like a fool over this white faced jigger. I don't git your idea. What does he amount to, anyway?"

"If he stays, I stay."

Nan's eyes were filled with tears, but her voice was firm. The man came closer to her, peering through his mask.

"You ain't gone loco, have you?"

"No, I am perfectly sane."

"And you'd give up a chance to git home safe—for that?"

He pointed disgustedly at Rex.

"I'll stay with him," she said chokingly.

"Well, f'r God's sake!"

THE MAN looked around, as if asking the wide world whether the girl wasn't crazy. He looked at Rex, who was watching Nan, wide eyed.

"Of all the loco things I ever heard of," grunted the man. "Listen, sister, is this on the square? Would you give up—say, don'tcha know there ain't a chance of you ever gettin' out here, unless somebody guides you? You'll die here, and the buzzards will strip your bones. Do you realize that? Do you? And still you'd stay with that weak kneed tenderfoot? Sluff off a chance to git home safe? You would? Well, I'd like to know why."

"Because," said Nan wearily, "I love him!"

The man jerked forward.

"You what? You love *him*? You love—"

"I have told you why I will stay," said Nan. "If he stays here, I stay, too."

"Well, hell!" exploded the man. "With all the reg'lar men in the state of Arizona—you pick that!"

He moved back and sat down on the rock, where he rolled another cigaret, only to toss it aside. After a long silence he said softly—

"Well, I'll be jiggered!"

"Won't you cut him loose?" begged Nan. "Can't you see those ropes are cutting him?"

"Pretty soft skinned. Why in hell didn't he stay where he belonged?"

But he made no move to release Rex; he was studying Nan, who humped on the rock, her hands between her knees, as she looked at Rex, her eyes filled with tears.

Finally the masked man got to his feet, looking down at Rex.

"I ain't got the sense that Gawd gave

geese in Ireland," he said slowly. "I've knowed lotsa married folks, and I've had me a girl onct or twict; but I never knowed that any woman ever cared enough f'r a man to sluff off a chance to save her life—f'r him."

He stepped over to Rex and quickly unfastened the ropes.

"You're not going to leave him here?" asked Nan, hardly believing that such was his intentions.

"Not if you want him that bad. T' me, he don't amount to a damn, and I'd jist as soon use him for buzzard bait as not; but if you— You two wait here. I've got to git my bronc. There's a way out the lower end of this cañon, if I can remember it. It's a long ways around, but it can't be helped."

He picked up his rope, swung it over his arm, grasped his rifle and went stumbling up the cañon, while Nan and Rex stood there, looking at each other.

"Thank God!" breathed Nan.

"Did you mean what you told him, Nan? Did you mean that you love me?"

"Well, I would have stayed," she said simply.

CHAPTER XIX

BEYOND DAVE MORGAN'S TRAIL

HASHKNIFE had little trouble in following Morgan, although Morgan seemed to be traveling more by guess than following a trail. It was so steep that a horse was obliged to sit on its rump and to keep angling from one side to another to keep from going headlong into the cañon.

About halfway down the side of the cañon, Hashknife's gray horse shoved loose a boulder of considerable size, which went bounding down the steep slope, crashing through the brush and splitting itself on the boulders at the bottom.

Hashknife realized that Dave Morgan would have to be deaf not to hear it; but there was no turning back now. He was riding the rump of the gray, his feet drawn back as far as possible to escape the brush.

Slipping and sliding, careening from side to side, the tall gray took him safely to the bottom of the cañon, where he dismounted. He had lost Morgan's trail, and there did not seem to be any way of recovering it. The bottom of the cañon at this point was a jumble of broken sandstone, boulders and brush, which seemed an impassable barrier to man and beast; but Hashknife knew there must be a way out.

The cañon was about six miles in length, and Hashknife had entered it at about a mile below the north end. After waiting awhile, trying to figure out where Morgan had gone, Hashknife picked up his reins and started to pick out a route down the cañon.

It was slow traveling. Time after time he was obliged to retrace his steps and select a new route. For over a mile he managed to find his way. His overall legs were flapping rags, and the knees of the tall gray were torn and bleeding.

"Tough goin', Ghost," grinned Hashknife. "If we ever go the length of this cañon, we deserve a medal."

At last he came to a place where he could not find a way through. The Cañon narrowed to a boxlike affair, not over sixty feet in width, with perpendicular sides, a hundred feet high.

Back went Hashknife and the gray horse to a point about three hundred yards away, where they began climbing the west side of the cañon. It was slow work, but they managed to get above the perpendicular sides of the box cañon.

And it was here that Hashknife was rewarded for his labor. Cut deeply in the side of the hill were the tracks of a horse, which had come down the side of the cañon at this point. Hashknife studied the situation, and from his point of view, Dave Morgan had cut back to the top of the cañon again, and had tried the descent at another place.

But this time Hashknife was careful to follow the tracks, which kept to the side of the hill, until reaching the sheer cliffs,

less than a mile from where Nan and Rex had found the cave. Hashknife stopped near the cliffs and scanned the country. Far above him and across the cañon, he could see the tiny scars, which indicated graded curves on the wagon road. Far down the cañon he could see a few buzzards, spiraling upward from the cañon bed.

That was where he wanted to go—down where the buzzards were. It meant another hard slide down the cañon, but he made it in safety. For some distance the trail led down the bottom of the cañon, where the tracks in the sand made it easy to follow the spoor of the other horse.

THE BUZZARDS were getting closer all the time. Again the trail led from the bottom, and Hashknife was obliged to dismount to follow, leading his horse. The last few hundred yards required nearly an hour to negotiate, and he suddenly broke through the brush on the very spot where the buzzards had been feeding on the roan horse from the 6X6, across the cañon bottom from the cave.

Hashknife watched the big birds leave their meal and then he examined the carcass. He found the strip of skin, which carried the 6X6 brand, and he sat down to ponder over it. There was not question in his mind that this horse had slid down from the grades, as the bones of the legs were broken, and as far as he was able to determine, the neck had also been broken. The saddle bore no name, and had been badly damaged.

Hashknife left the carcass and tied his horse to a snag. Sliding down into the bottom of the cañon, he discovered Nan's tracks, which were very plain. This proved to him that Nan had reached the bottom alive and he heaved a sigh of satisfaction. Fifty feet farther down the cañon he found the empty revolver where the masked man had thrown it. From the way it had skidded in the sand, he knew it had been thrown from the west side of the cañon.

Hashknife felt sure that neither Nan nor Rex had been armed when they left the ranch; and this gun, with six empty shells in the cylinder, proved that some one had been doing some shooting in the cañon.

He climbed the west bank and came out almost under the overhang of the cave. After a careful survey of the surrounding country he climbed up over the shelves of sandstone to the entrance of the cave.

Here was an odor of wood smoke, although the fire had long since died out. Cautiously he advanced into the shallow cave, gun in hand. It was light enough for him to see the outstretched form of Napoleon Bonaparte Briggs near the pile of ashes.

Briggs had been tied securely with a length of lariat rope, with the loop drawn tightly around his neck. Napoleon Bonaparte Briggs was as dead as a man might be, and Hashknife could see that he had died from strangulation, although he had been badly battered.

Hashknife loosened the ropes. In spite of the battered face, Hashknife was able to recognize the old 6X6 cook. On the left side of his head was a furrow, which seemed to have been made by a bullet, but with so many cuts and bruises it was difficult to say which were the worse wounds.

The old man's coat had been almost torn from his body, but in the inside pocket Hashknife found several folded papers, which he took to the cave entrance to examine.

For perhaps five minutes he sat on a sandstone ledge, pondering deeply over them, while the shadows of the buzzards drifted back and forth across the slope below him.

Finally he pocketed the papers and went back in the cave, where he dragged the old man's body farther away from the entrance.

"Mebbe you'll be a mummy by the time you get out of here, old-timer," he said. "I'd take you out, if I could; but I can't. So long."

Hashknife went back down the slope, where he found the track of a horse, going

down the cañon. It went down past the old waterfall, where the tracks were plainly outlined in the sand.

"Must be a way out the lower end," he decided. "If I can get Ghost down into this danged place, I'll try my luck. It can't be any worse than the way I came in—and it must be shorter."

He managed to pick out a possible place to get down, and went back for the gray horse.

THE SHADOWS from the mesquite clumps were growing long on the mesa below the mouth of Coyote Cañon. Farther to the south was the blue haze over the flat land toward Cañonville. Blue quail were calling to one another from the brushy slopes, their plaintive *ca Cuckoo, ca Cuckoo* being the only sound to break the silence.

A lean coyote, like a gray shadow, came limping along past a mesquite, where he stopped in the shade, his ears cocked toward the sound of feeding quail. A brush rabbit rustled in the mesquite, and the coyote shifted his head quickly. Suddenly he lifted his nose. Down the wind came a scent, which he quickly associated with men who carried guns and lariat ropes. More like a shadow than before, the coyote seemed to fade out of sight through a convenient cover, while from a spot upwind came the soft crackling of brush.

First came the masked man, leading the bay horse, with Nan in the saddle. Behind them—quite a way behind them—came Rex Morgan, staggering along, looking like a rag man, or rather a man of rags.

The masked man stopped the horse and allowed Rex to join them.

"Devil of a trip, huh?" grunted the man. "Well, here's where I leave you."

He pointed up the slope.

"About half a mile up thataway you strike the road. Turn left for Mesa City."

Nan dismounted and stood beside Rex, while the masked man mounted his horse.

"I'd like to thank you," she said.

"You don't need to. Your sweetheart shore looks fagged, don't he? You ain't a very good picker, ma'am. Them shoes he's wearin' wasn't built f'r Coyote Cañon. Good luck to you. I don't *sabe* women—not a-tall. So long."

He spurred his horse to a gallop and soon disappeared, traveling south. Nan and Rex looked foolishly at each other. Rex's shoes were ready to fall off his feet, which were bleeding. Nan was a little better off, because she had ridden the horse, but her face was drawn from suffering and lack of food.

"We've got to walk home," she said.

Rex nodded, shifting his feet painfully, and they started toward the road.

Rex was game. Every step was torture, but he gritted his teeth and kept going. They were both staggering before they reached the road, and Rex was laughing foolishly, as they sat down to gain a little strength before attempting the steep grades.

"I haven't any feeling," said Rex weakly. "My legs and arms belong to some one else, I think."

"And your feet are all blood, Rex."

"I know. But we are out of that terrible cañon. Everything will be all right now, Nan. I want to sing, but I can't think of a single song. It is like waking up from an awful dream. I wonder who that man is, Nan. What was he doing in that cañon, and why did he want to leave me there, all tied up in that rope? It all seems so ridiculous—now. I have never harmed any one in my life, except the clothing clerk in Northport, Spike Cahill and the crazy man. And they couldn't really hold any grudge for that, because it was in self-defense. Queer country out here. Somebody always trying to kill somebody else. But I like it, Nan."

She did not reply. After a few moments he turned his head and looked at her. She was leaning against a rock, sound asleep, her hands folded in her lap. He sighed and shifted to a more comfortable position.

IT WAS nearly dark when something awoke Rex. He lifted his head quickly, trying to understand what it was all about, trying to realize where he was. A great, gray shape loomed over him in the half light, and there sounded the creak of saddle leather, the jingle of spurs.

Then he heard the voice of Hashknife Hartley saying—

"You poor kid, this is Hashknife."

But Hashknife wasn't talking to him, he was talking to Nan. And the great, gray shape was Ghost.

Nan was crying and Hashknife was patting her on the shoulder, telling her that everything was all right. Rex staggered around the horse to Hashknife, and the tall cowboy put an arm around his shoulders.

"I trailed you out of the cañon," said Hashknife. "My Lord, what a trail! You're all right now, Nan. How 'r' you comin', Rex?"

"I don't know," confessed Rex weakly. "I've got so many sore spots that I am just one big ache. Are you all right, Nan?"

"Oh, I don't know," she replied wearily. "I must have gone to sleep, you see."

"Well, that's all right," laughed Hashknife. "I'll boost you up on Ghost, and we'll head for home."

He picked Nan up in his arms and placed her in the saddle.

"I'll give you a leg up, Rex," he said. "You ride behind Nan. Ghost is broke to ride double."

"But you can't walk all the way," protested Nan.

"Can't I? Shucks, I could walk to the moon right now."

He helped Rex on behind the saddle, and they went on up the winding grades, while Nan told Hashknife the story of what had happened to them from the time some one shot Rex's horse until they left the masked man on the mesa.

"I thought you'd see the buzzards," said Rex.

"I seen 'em. Gosh, what an experience you had."

"I think Rex went crazy for a while," said Nan, "when he fought with the crazy man."

"Did you tie him up after the fight?" asked Hashknife.

"We didn't have anything to tie him with," said Rex, "but he never tried to get up, you see."

"Uh-huh."

The moon was up when they reached the spot where Rex and Nan had dropped into the cañon. It silvered the hills and the cliffs on the opposite side of the cañon.

"Oh, we forgot about the crazy man!" exclaimed Nan. "He's still down there in the cave, you know, Hashknife."

"Don't worry about him, Nan."

They plodded on around the grades, down around the sharp turns, where the stage had given Rex his wild introduction to the country, and on through the flat land to the forks of the road, where they turned to the Lane ranch.

The ranch-house was dark.

"Queer isn't it?" said Rex. "When I was asleep back there, I dreamed about that Navaho rug. It had blood on it—in my dream, Hashknife."

"Yeah. It ain't on the fence down there now; somebody took it."

"Oh, I'll bet your feet are worn raw," said Nan. "With those high heel boots on."

"Feet are all right. Here we are."

Rex slid down, and Hashknife lifted Nan from the saddle.

THE KITCHEN table was just as Hashknife and Sleepy had left it after the bullet had driven the milk can between Sleepy's eyes. Both Nan and Rex were still wobbling, and they watched Hashknife build a fire in the kitchen stove. He put on a big kettle of water.

"I can get the meal," said Nan. "I feel fine again."

"Start in with some coffee, Nan. There's half of that pie in the oven. I could drink a pot of coffee myself. Show me where you keep your writin' paper and ink, will you, Nan?"

They found it in the drawer of the table in the living room, along with an old pen.

"You fix the coffee," said Hashknife. "I've got to write a note."

He placed a lamp on the table, while Nan went back to the kitchen, where Rex was removing what was left of his shoes. Hashknife took a folded piece of paper from his pocket, propped it up against a book and filled his pen.

He wrote slowly on the cheap sheet of paper, so slowly that it seemed he was copying something. His brow was knitted deeply, almost covering the gray eyes, as the broken pen holder moved slowly in his cramped fingers.

Finally the document was finished to his satisfaction and, after folding it roughly, he placed it in the inside pocket of his vest. The paper he had propped against the book went into a hip pocket, and he got up from the table, a half smile on his thin lips.

Nan was limping around the table in the kitchen, while Rex looked ruefully at his swollen feet.

"I'll have some hot water for you in a few minutes, dear," said Nan.

Rex looked up quickly at Hashknife. It was the first time she had ever called Rex by that title. The gray eyes shifted to Nan and back to Rex. Neither of them had told Hashknife just why the masked man had taken them out of the cañon. Perhaps it was a subject that neither of them cared to discuss with a third party.

CHAPTER XX

INDIRECT INHERITANCE

CAME the sound of running horses, the thump of footsteps on the rickety porch, and Sleepy came stamping through the living room, while behind him came Lem Sheeley. At sight of Nan, Sleepy let out a joyful yelp and grabbed Hashknife by the shoulders.

"Where didja find 'em?" he yelled. "My, this is great, ain't it? Where you been? Look at the kid's feet, will you? Why don't somebody say somethin'? All dumb, are you?"

"Are you run down?" queried Hashknife mildly.

"Well—yeah!" snorted Sleepy. "Talk a little."

Both Sleepy and Lem crowded into the kitchen and humped on their heels against the wall, while Hashknife told what he knew and what Nan and Rex had told him. The coffee pot boiled over before the tale was told, but no one noticed such a small detail.

"But what's it all about?" complained Lem. "There ain't head nor tail to it. All this crazy man in the cañon, and a man with a mask stuff. Sounds kinda looney to me."

"It does sound crazy," smiled Hashknife.

"Like a sheepherder's dream," grunted Sleepy. "After we left you we spent about three hours tryin' to find a way down into that cañon, but had to give up. It's one awful place, Hashknife. I don't *sabe* how you ever found a place to get in. Me and Lem had an idea of tryin' to get down at the lower end, but gave it up until we heard from you."

"Where are the other boys?" asked Hashknife.

"Mesa City, gettin' their bills wet," grunted Sleepy. "Spike Cahill dang near broke his neck in that cañon. He thought he could slide a hundred feet down a thirty foot rope, but found it was too short on one end."

Nan poured the coffee and refilled the pot. She and Rex split the half pie, while Rex bathed his feet in warm water. He was too tired even to tell them whether the water was too hot, and Sleepy almost cooked him with it.

"Well, what next?" asked Lem, finishing his coffee.

Hashknife shoved his cup aside and got to his feet.

"I reckon we'll go back to Mesa City," he said.

Sleepy eyed him closely, knowing that something real had caused him to make that decision. It was not merely to go to town. Hashknife's feet were too sore for a pleasure trip.

"We're with you, cowboy," declared Sleepy. "My, you're feet must be tender."

"Not a bit; can't feel anythin'."

He turned to Nan.

"Better go to bed pretty quick, and don't worry any more. Fix up the kid's feet the best you can, and they'll be all right. C'mon, boys."

He limped from the house to his horse, with the two men close behind him. Ghost nickered softly and rubbed his muzzle against Hashknife's vest.

"Can't travel very fast," said Hashknife. "That cañon is shore hard on a horse. There's places where Ghost had to almost crawl on his knees. You shore need sky hooks and a lot of faith in the Almighty to make that trip."

IT WAS rather a big night at the Oasis, as far as the bar was concerned. Morgan was helping the overworked bartender, while Mesa City discussed what had become of Nan and Rex. Hashknife, too, had not been accounted for, but Spike Cahill declared that Hashknife could take care of himself.

"But he never got into that cañon," said Cal Dickenson, of Dave Morgan's outfit. "I tell you, it can't be done."

"The devil it can't!" snorted Spike. "I was jist one inch of goin' into it myself today. A hondo on that rope was all that saved me. A inch ain't far, Cal."

The boys laughed with Spike. They knew just how close he had come to smashing his bones on the rocks.

Joe Cave came in from the Flying M and joined the gang. Joe was cold sober now, but willing to be otherwise.

"It's too lonesome out there," he told Morgan. "You didn't tell me that all the rest of the gang had left."

"I did, too," said Morgan. "Mebbe you was too drunk to pay any attention."

"Mebbe," grinned Joe sourly. "Gimme whisky."

"Whatsa matter?" asked Spike, watching Joe gulp down a glass of liquor. "Is your swallerin' apparatus busted. I'll leave it to anybody around her, if Joe's Adam's apple didn't jump sideways to let that drink jump past."

"His Adam's apple ain't so dumb," said Bert Roddy solemnly. "It knows what it means to git in front of a runaway drink of Oasis liquor. Sleepy Stevens says the only safe way is to drink quick and shut your mouth. He says that kinda whisky bounces."

"Where's Sleepy?" asked a cowboy.

"Him and Lem pulled out about an hour ago."

"What was Lem doin' here?" asked Joe Cave.

"Prob'ly lookin' for you," grinned Spike. "He shore did look sad. Mebbe he mourns his loss."

"I s'pose he does," grinned Joe. "That's a awful job—packin' food to a prisoner. I'm glad I quit."

"Yea-a-ah, you quit!" flared Bert Roddy. "You got drunk, and he fired you, Joe."

Joe grimaced and reached for the bottle.

"I suppose that's what Lem said."

"Yeah, and he don't lie," declared Spike.

Joe glared at Spike, but dropped the argument. He had no desire to tangle with that ex-6X6 gang.

"How about a little poker," suggested Dave Morgan.

"Very little for me," replied Dell Bowen. "I'm almost broke enough to take a job with you, Dave."

"That's fine with me; I can use you."

MORGAN left the bar and began arranging a check rack on one of the tables, when Hashknife limped in, followed by Sleepy and Lem.

"There's the old cañon crawler now!" whooped Spike.

Hashknife smiled thinly and looked around, nodding to the men. Morgan halted with a stack of chips in his hand.

"Just in time, Hartley," he said. "Grab a seat."

"Didja get down into the cañon?" asked Spike.

"I shore did," smiled Hashknife.

"F'r gosh sake, where? Did Sleepy tell you the trouble we had? Where'd you get down?"

"Morgan showed me the place."

All eyes were turned to Dave Morgan. He placed his chips on the table and looked at Hashknife.

"Did you foller me down?" he asked easily.

"I did."

"Well, I'll be darned. After you boys left here, I got an idea that there might be a place to get down; so I rode down and tried it. I never knew anybody was follerin' me. Sure, I got down. But I couldn't get anywhere; so I went north agin', and finally gave it up."

Hashknife's eyes narrowed slightly. He knew that the falling stone in the cañon had warned Morgan.

"I see," he said thoughtfully. "That's how I missed your trail down there. But I found a way through."

"The devil you did!" exploded Spike. "What'd you find?"

Hashknife's eyes traveled slowly over the crowd.

"I found a blue roan 6X6 horse, with a saddle on it. The buzzards found it first, but there was enough left."

"Blue roan?" queried Bert Roddy. Was it Napoleon Bonaparte Briggs' blue roan?"

"I think so, Bert."

"Where's old Briggs?" demanded Morgan. "I want to get my hands on that old thief. He opened that safe—"

"Briggs is dead," interrupted Hashknife. "He had been all battered up, and I think a bullet had scored his head. I found him down there in a cave, with a tight rope around his neck—jist buzzard bait."

For several moments there was silence, broken by Spike's—

"My God!"

Sleepy moved back slightly, his right hand brushing over his gun butt.

"He was drunk when he left here," said Bert Roddy. "He must 'a' rode off the grade. Poor old Briggs."

"Do you think he shot himself and then choked himself to death with the rope?" asked Hashknife slowly.

"Oh, I forgot that," said Bert. "He couldn't have done all that, Hartley."

"Sounds foolish," said Dave Morgan. "The body is down there in a cave to prove it."

"Oh, I'm not disputin' your word, Hartley."

"And last night," said Hashknife slowly, "somebody shot Rex Morgan's horse on the Coyote Cañon grade, while him and Nan Lane was ridin' to Cañonville. They kept shootin', and drove the kid and the girl over the edge, where they slid all the way to the bottom. God only knows how they lived. I reckon they had a hell of a time. Briggs was down there, crazy as a loon. He stuck 'em up with a gun and took the girl to a cave; but the kid follered and whipped Briggs, knockin' him out cold. I reckon it bumped Briggs' head pretty hard, 'cause he didn't wake up the last they saw of him. But they never roped him."

Hashknife paused to let this soak in.

"YOU MEAN there was somebody else down there?" asked Lem hoarsely.

"A masked man," said Hashknife. "He choked Briggs to death with the rope and then brought them two kids out to the south mesa, where he left 'em. I found 'em down there, all fagged out, and brought 'em home."

"What masked man?" demanded Dave Morgan. "Talk sense."

"The man who shot Rex Morgan's horse last night. The same man who shot Noah Evans on the porch of the Lane ranch-house, Morgan—shot him, thinkin' it was the tenderfoot kid. The same man who fired a shot through the window at the Lane ranch-house last night and almost killed Sleepy Stevens."

"There's been quite a lot goin' on around here, it seems to me," said Joe Cave, laughing shortly.

"But your explanation don't tell us anythin'," said Dave Morgan, stepping away from the table.

"It told me quite a lot," said Hashknife.

"But there's more to it than that, folks. Did any of you examine the spot where Peter Morgan was killed? Well, you might 'a' been surprised. There wasn't any blood spilled. Peter Morgan was dead long before he came to that place. And the man or men who brought him there, killed him in the 6X6 ranch-house on a Navaho rug, which has a lightenin' mark on it. To remove the blood, they took rug and all with 'em. And when they was gettin' away, that tenderfoot kid rode in on 'em, and they popped him over the head. They thought they had killed him, and took him along to the Lane ranch. They sunk the rug in the creek. And when they knew we had found the rug—they stole it."

The men were all staring at Hashknife, whose face was drawn, lips almost white.

"Cave!" he snapped. "You made a mistake this mornin'. You should have been just as drunk outside of town as you was in it."

Joe Cave flinched, as if some one had seared him with a hot iron.

"You've got mask marks on your face, Cave!" Hashknife's voice snapped like a whip.

With a jerk of his hand, Cave started to reach for his face, but sagged back against the bar.

"And you made a mistake, Morgan," whispered Hashknife. "Why didn't you kill Briggs on flat ground, so you could search him, instead of shooting him off the grade into the cañon, where you couldn't get at him? He had somethin' in his pocket that you needed bad."

Joe Cave was the first to act. As he sagged back against the bar, his right hand flashed down to his gun. He was trapped. Morgan's gun was coming out like a flash, but his bullet ripped into the floor, echoing the crash of Sleepy's .45.

Cave sprang away from the bar, screaming a curse, with Spike Cahill clinging like grim death to his gun hand. Lem shot across the space, knocking the table aside, and threw one arm around Cave's neck, shutting off his wind, while Spike tore away the gun.

Morgan went to his knees, blindly groping for the gun which had fallen from his nerveless hand, but Hashknife kicked it aside, and Morgan sprawled on his face. They flung Cave in a chair, and Lem handcuffed him, while Cave cursed them bitterly.

ONE OF the men ran for the doctor, but Lem turned Morgan over to discover that a doctor was not needed. Hashknife patted Sleepy on the back and leaned against the bar.

"Dead, is he?" gritted Joe Cave.

"You're lucky not to be with him," said Spike nervously.

"Like hell I am! Why didn't he live long enough to tell the truth? Nobody will believe me. Dave killed Pete. I was out there with him. He didn't go to kill him; he went to borrow money. I wasn't even in the house. He wouldn't lend Dave money; so Dave killed him, I don't know how Hartley knows so much about it. Dave wanted to lay the blame on Lane; so we took the body there. We didn't know who that kid was, but Dave said to take him along. I shot Noah Evans by mistake. Dave promised to give me this saloon for helpin' him. He wanted to git rid of that tenderfoot, and yesterday we had a quarrel about it. I was afraid he'd kill me as soon as I done his dirty work. I shot the kid's horse on the grade, and I swiped the rug, jist before I shot through the winder. And that's all the truth."

"And Dave Morgan robbed Pete's safe, didn't he?" asked Spike.

"Sure did. He was worried about a will. He thought old Briggs knowed too much; so he waylaid Briggs on the Coyote Cañon grade. But Briggs went into the cañon."

"What did you go down there for today?" asked Hashknife.

"To see what happened. I know that cañon like a book."

"And you choked Briggs?"

"You found him, didn't you. No use of me lyin'."

"Well, for God's sake!" blurted Lem.

"Old Man Lane ain't guilty a-tall."

"But who tied Pete on the horse?" asked Lem. "That part of it ain't explained."

"Nan and Rex," said Hashknife. "They found the body in the corral and wanted to get rid of it. That's what made me sure Paul Lane never killed him, Lem. If he had, he'd have hid the body—not left it there to cinch him for murder. If there hadn't been any more shootin', I might have believed Old Man Lane guilty; but there was too much shootin' goin' on. The fact that Dave Morgan would inherit the 6X6 made me suspect him; but he couldn't do it all alone. He had to have help, but I didn't know who to suspect. I never thought of Joe Cave, until Lem fired him for bein' drunk."

"Wasn't anythin' about that, was there?" asked Lem.

"A puncher," said Hashknife slowly, "don't usually get drunk that early in the mornin', and they don't usually take a chance on losin' a good job. It kinda looked to me as though Joe wanted to lose that job; so I rode out of town to see how he acted after he got away from town. He sobered up too quick. He had to be fired in order to make it look right. You see, he was due to take over this saloon."

"Morgan said you ought to be killed," said Joe wearily.

"What did you and Morgan quarrel about down in the sheriff's office, Joe?"

"Did you hear that, too? He wanted me to go out to the ranch and kill Rex Morgan. I was gettin' scared. But I wanted this saloon. I heard them comin' on the grade; so I let 'em past before I shot. I never missed so bad before, but the light was awful bad.

"Just one thing more, Cave," said Hashknife. "When you had a chance down there, why didn't you kill the tenderfoot?"

Joe sighed and looked at the handcuffs.

"I was a fool," he said slowly. "I don't *sabe* women. This 'n said she wanted the tenderfoot so bad that she'd rather stay with him than git out alone. And if you've ever been down there, where nothing much but a buzzard or a lion can git, you can *sabe* how bad she wanted him."

"And that's why you brought 'em out, Joe?"

"Wasn't that enough?"

THE DOCTOR came and made an examination of Dave Morgan's body. He did not even open his black bag.

The crowd wanted more explanation. Hashknife drew a folded paper from his inside vest pocket and handed it to Lem, who read it, while the crowd leaned in over his wide shoulders to see what it was all about. It read:

> This is mi last will—when im ded.
>
> To Mary Morgan, mi legil wife i hearby leave the 6X6 ranch and everything on it. i don't leave nuthing to Dave Morgan cause he dont diserve it.
>
> If Mary dyes it goes to her nearist kin. To Napoleon Bonaparte Briggs i hearby give the Oasis saloon he aint got no branes so he will have to give Jack Farewether a job as long as the saloon keeps open. This is mi onley will.
>
> Yrs Respy
>
> —Peter Morgan
> his X mark
>
> P. S. wrote bi Napoleon Bonaparte Briggs oct 18 1904 because Pete Morgan cant wright.

Len read it aloud to the men. Spike Cahill examined it closely, handing it back to Lem.

"That's old Briggs' writin', he declared. "I'd know it among a million."

The other boys agreed with Spike.

"That's it," said Bert Roddy. "I know how he writes his name. But where is Pete's wife? Nobody around here knows he ever had a wife."

"The tenderfoot is her son," said Hashknife. "We can prove it, can't we, Lem?"

The big sheriff nodded quickly.

"Somebody wired him when his wife died. We got a copy of the telegram."

"Pete never got it," said Joe Cave. "It came to the post office, and Dave claimed it. He knowed that the kid was Pete's son."

"Well, it's all perfectly clear now," said Lem. "Ready to take a ride, Joe?"

"It ain't because I'm ready, Lem. Better get me a fresh horse. I had to circle and go across the river to get back from that mesa."

"LET'S all go down and congratulate the tenderfoot," suggested Spike, and when Lem took his prisoner to Cañonville, there were nine other riders, who accompanied them to the forks of the road.

They rode up to the ranch-house and trooped inside, where they found Rex humped down in a rocking chair, his feet bandaged. Nan was in her room, but the uproar awoke her and she peered out at the crowd.

Spike was hammering Rex on the back and trying to shake hands with him at the same time, while the bewildered Rex was trying to puzzle out what it was all about.

"Put on a blanket and come out, Nan," advised Hashknife. "This gang won't take no for an answer."

Nan wrapped herself in a gaudy blanket and came out timidly. She looked like a very little and very tired Indian.

"You tell 'em, Hashknife," said Spike.

"It's too long a tale to tell now," said Hashknife, "but it amounts to this, Nan. Your father will be turned loose tomorrow. Dave Morgan killed Pete Morgan, who was the father of Rex. We've cleared that all up. Dave Morgan is dead, and I found the will that gives Rex the 6X6.

"You mean—my dad is free?" asked Nan.

"Jist as soon as they can unlock the jail, Nan."

She stood there in front of them, the blanket tucked up around her chin, crying. There was no effort to hide the tears. The cowboys turned away.

"Oh!" snorted Spike.

"What are you kickin' about?" growled Bert.

"Somebody stepped on my foot."

"Ain't been anybody within six feet of you."

"And I—I own the 6X6?" asked Rex foolishly.

"You shore do!" exclaimed Spike. "It's your ranch, kid."

Rex blinked at them foolishly.

"And Peter Morgan was my father? It was he who sent that check to my mother?"

"I reckon it was Briggs," said Hashknife. "Peter Morgan didn't want anybody to know; so he had Briggs send the checks."

"Was he ashamed of my mother?"

"I dunno. We'll never know, Rex; they're both gone. You be content with what he left you."

Rex nodded dumbly. He could hardly understand his great fortune. The boys came and shook hands with him. They all wanted to shake hands with Nan, but she had slipped away to her room. The boys filed out of the house, mounted their horses and headed back to Mesa City. Hashknife yawned wearily and started for the door.

"Hashknife," said Rex slowly, "I don't understand anything. I know you are the one responsible for all this good fortune, but I can't think of just what to say. If, as you say, the 6X6 belongs to me, will you take charge of it? I don't know anything about it. I'd like to hire all those boys."

"Well, I dunno. Might work out thatway, Rex. We've got to put up our horses now."

He and Sleepy stabled their mounts and gave them a meal of oats. As they closed the stable door, Sleepy said—

"How much of that will is true, Hashknife?"

"How much?" Hashknife hesitated for several moments.

"Your fingers are all stained with ink, cowboy."

Hashknife chuckled softly.

"Some day, you'll be a detective, Sleepy. C'mere."

They backed against the stable, where Hashknife took a crumpled piece of paper from his hip pocket. He scratched a match and held the paper for Sleepy

to read. The writing was identical with that of the other will, but read:

> This is mi last will—when im ded.
>
> To Mary Morgan, legal wife of Dave Morgan i hearby give the 6X6 ranch to own. i dont give nothing to Dave Morgan he dont deserve it.
>
> If Mary dyes it goes to her nearist kin. To Napoleon Bonaparte Briggs I hearby give the Oasis saloon he aint got no branes so he will have to give Jack Farewether a job as long as the saloon keeps open. This is mi onely will. Yrs Respy
> —Peter Morgan
> his X mark
>
> P. S. wrote bi Napoleon Bonaparte Briggs oct 18 1904 because Pete Morgan cant wright.

HASHKNIFE was obliged to light a second match before Sleepy could finish reading the document, and as Sleepy straightened up with a soft whistle of astonishment, Hashknife touched the match to a corner of the paper and they watched it burn to crinkly ashes.

"I wrote that other will, Sleepy," said Hashknife slowly. "It works out the same way, as far as the property is concerned. But when a young man is slated to marry a danged sweet young lady, and don't know anythin' about his paternal ancestor, why not start him off right, as far as his father is concerned?"

"That's right," said Sleepy softly. "It don't hurt nobody. Look at that, will you?"

Silhouetted against the ranch-house window were two figures, about a foot apart. One figure greatly resembled a blanketed Indian, the other a scarecrow, with rags dangling from its arms, making queer motions.

Sleepy laughed softly.

"Look at him, will you? He's probably tellin' her in good English what he's goin' to do with the 6X6. Betcha he ain't even kissed her. Hashknife, that feller is almost dumb enough to make a good cowpuncher."

Suddenly the figures blended, and Hashknife turned his back, as he fumbled for his cigaret papers.

"Not so dumb," he said slowly.

"Well, that one is over," chuckled Sleepy.

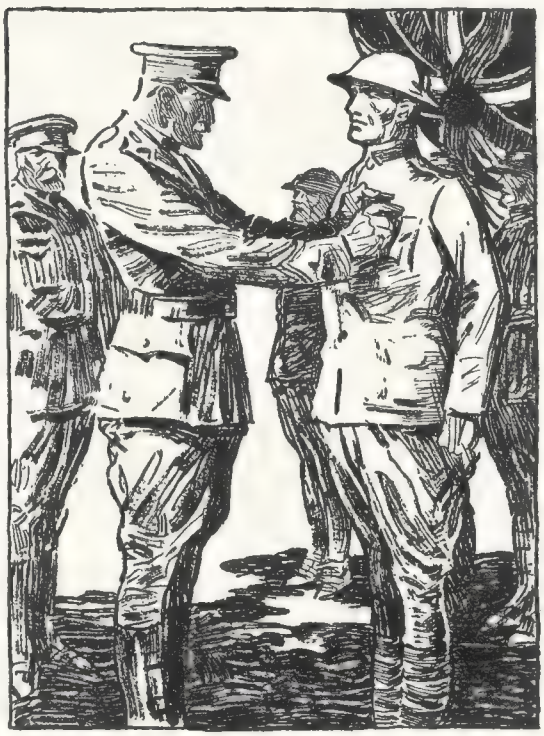
"Good. Now, I can heat some water and soak my blisters."

They pulled their hats low over their eyes and headed for the kitchen door.

"It cost the Crown but a few cents, but the gold of the world could not buy it"

FOR VALOUR

By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE



THE ORDERLY departed; Sir Guy would be alone for ten minutes. Reverently he picked up the Victoria Cross, pinned it beside a number of medals on his breast and stepped to a mirror. It was a beautiful thing of bronze, crimson ribbon and the simple, eloquent letters, "For Valour". It cost the Crown but a few cents, but the gold of the world could not buy it. His grandfather fought in the Crimean War and almost won it; and died believing the next in line would win this most coveted order in British military service. But fortune had denied Sir Guy's father the honor and he died as the first shots of the World War were fired.

"But Guy will win it," the old knight whispered as he was passing. "It's in the blood to be in the thick of it—fight or frolic. Blood tells! Blood always tells in fight or frolic!"

And Sir Guy, just home from a big game expedition in the provinces, had promised his father he would be in the thick of it. But those in command remembered his astute strategy during annual maneuvers and ordered him to duty well behind the lines. He cursed them roundly to their faces, then apologized and threw himself into the assignment.

And now they had given him the Victoria Cross to pin on the breast of a halfbreed youth from the provinces. Slowly he removed the decoration. It did not belong on his breast. He had not won it, but he had gratified in small measure the desire to see how it looked on his breast. No one had witnessed his action; no harm done.

"Damn it! If they'd give me a day or two in the thick of it I might . . ."

He was too big; too broad to envy any

man, yet what knight worthy the dubbing would not have exchanged places with humble Corporal Joseph Tench, the breed boy from the provinces? It would be an honor to pin the V. C. on so heroic a breast and to salute the man.

On the field the men were forming rank on rank to honor one of their number. Sir Guy sensed rather than heard the thunder of their marching feet. Providence had been kind. He had been granted wealth and honor among men, yet the priceless gift of children had been denied him.

"When I die," he said aloud, "blood that has been in the thick of it for generations will cease."

He began to pace the room.

"If I had a son . . ."

He did not finish, but the picture was there, for the line was alike—steel blue eyes, jaw that was peculiarly square, a daring smile, a strange blending of utter recklessness and caution. But it was the jaw and smile that stamped the blood. He was proud of his line. The women were beautiful and loyal; the men fought, played, loved and died.

"Before God! I'd sell my soul for a son in the thick of it!"

It seemed as if every man but himself had a son at the front: superiors, subordinates, equals. Even the dried up little chap who wrote his letters fathered three youths in the thick of it.

The rumble of marching feet ceased; an aide knocked, entered and smartly saluted. The escort was waiting. Sir Guy experienced a strange thrill as he stepped into place; an instinctive feeling that he faced an unusual situation. He had decorated men before, but this was the first time he had been given the honor of pinning the V. C. on a man's breast. And what a man this Corporal Tench must be!

The incident was fresh in his mind. The company had been wiped out but for a platoon in command of a corporal. The platoon was composed exclusively of natives and breeds from the Yukon and Pelly River country. Sir Guy was familiar with the type. He had hunted in the district twenty-three years before and returned with one of the finest bags ever brought to England. The men were big, capable, fearless fellows; the squaws fat and solemn; the maids afire with life and color. He recalled Nakota, a princess in bearing, copper in color.

And this corporal from that remote land had displayed the leadership of a chieftain, had so handled his men and machine guns that an army corps paused and hell was unleashed. Only the corporal lived, and he fought them alone for a half hour. The deed stirred Sir Guy to the depths. It was the sort of row he would have enjoyed. The aide interrupted him:

"Corporal Tench requested his part be overlooked, sir, and the crosses be sent to the mothers of the men who died. He said that squaws are mothers, sir! Said it in a way . . ."

"Exactly!"

And this Corporal Tench had made it known he wished Sir Guy to decorate him—if they insisted on the decoration. Somehow the knight was touched. He remembered Nakota again. It was possible her son—she was beautiful and doubtless married—was in the thick of it; had died in action. He could picture her grief, alone on the river bank.

THE RANKS of men became a setting for the single man who had suddenly stepped before him—Corporal Joseph Tench. Steel blue eyes met steel blue eyes; such eyes are rare among natives; a peculiarly square jaw opposed a peculiarly square jaw, and the aide noticed Sir Guy falter and almost drop the medal which three generations had coveted.

With an effort Sir Guy recovered a degree of self-control. His nervous fingers pinned the medal on the corporal's breast; rigidly he stepped back and saluted. And then . . .

A thousand men speculated on why this native's deed should prove so moving. Sir Guy gathered the youth to his breast, kissed him after the manner of the French officers, then with upturned face breathed a prayer to his God while knightly tears fell on the bronze and ribbon of the V. C.

A STORY OF

KO-BO *the* CROCODILE

"HE HATES me," said Blay, son of Tu-op, "as the crocodile hates the monkey."

His father grinned. They were squatting in the smoky, flame-reddened dusk of the corner of the house, and Tu-op pulled tranquilly at his pipe.

"And for the same reason?" he asked.

The question hinted at a story so vastly improper that it could only be told in the Moi language and probably no one but a jungle villager could fully appreciate it.

"I made a fool of him," said Blay, "as the monkey made a fool of Ko-bo, but it was in a different way."

Tu-op knew the story. It would be difficult for anything of that sort to happen in Ban Dong without coming to Tu-op's inquisitive old ears. But he allowed his son to go on and tell it, for it did the boy honor and one can never hear too much of such things.

"Kroon has always called himself a great hunter," Blay began. "When he is in his right mind he always says he is afraid of nothing that man can see or hear. When he is half-full of rice wine he is ready to kill an elephant with his bare hands; but when he is filled up with rice wine he forgets to brag and goes to sleep."

Blay told the story in long loving repetitions of detail. How the egregious Kroon snored and mumbled in his drunken sleep, and the charming picture he made lying full length in the mud of the river bank, were minutely described. It was to the river that Blay dragged him, an impudent liberty to take with any man who had passed into the dreams of alcohol; and he left him there with his face toward the brown water.

While the other *pakams* of Ban Dong grinned and watched, Blay ran upstream to where, just beyond the village stockade, he had moored the limp body of a dead crocodile. The monster, which Blay himself had captured and killed the day before, was towed down to the place where the unconscious Kroon was lying. His awakening had to take place in full sight of all the village. Within a foot of Kroon's face the crocodile's jaws were propped open and his forelegs were stretched out in a vague semblance of life.

It was a great joke, of course, when Kroon awoke. He did not see his friends perched around in trees and all along the

INDO-CHINA

By Lyman Bryson

bank. He yawned and rubbed his eyes and opened them upon the vision of a crocodile's gullet. For a moment at least he was not a great hunter. He shrieked in abject fright and curled back from the thing like a startled cat. His bronze cheeks were bloodless and his knees bent under him when he tried to rise and run.

It was a long moment before the delighted shouts of men and women and children all around brought him to. Then, of course, he tried hard to brave it out. He kicked the propped crocodile over with a bare foot and waved his arms in wrath.

"Go back to your master, Ko-bo," he shouted. "Tell him I eat dead beasts that are clean. And only live beasts can eat me."

He marched off in very solemn dignity while the shouts of the audience went joyously after him and echoed in the forest. And in the smoky shadows of Tu-op's house, where Blay's own family and the family from which he sprang lived together in filial amity, the reminiscent laughter of Blay re-echoed.

He went on to recall the equally splendid fact that he had been challenged by the humiliated Kroon to a wrestling match and had thrown Kroon so hard against the baked dirt of the village street that the challenger suffered a crippled shoulder for a month.

Tu-op's own laughter was milder and died in an old man's wheeze.

"Enjoy him while you can," he said, "but remember, my son, that he is himself like Ko-bo. Kroon is of the crocodile breed. Kroon knows how to lie in wait—in the mud if necessary, until he gets his chance."

"And the monkey swings on the vines and jeers him, doesn't he?" demanded Blay confidently. "He cannot hurt me."

"Watch the mud," Tu-op cautioned. "Sometimes it comes alive and bites."

II

IT WAS impossible to tell what might be brewing in the resentful mind of Kroon. He had always been surnamed "The Surly", and his truculence did not betray how much he felt this new chagrin. He kept out of Blay's way and poked at his own rice field with a sharp stick and in public kept his own counsel. It was a

quiet season in Ban Dong. The men had nothing to do but watch the ill-tended rice grow scantily in the clearings. The women had only to weave and bake and cook and carry and tend their babies and humor their husbands. Quarrels grow easily in such a season, unless there is hunting or war or something else to make men forget their smallest troubles.

But two explorers from Saigon, two of those queer pale faced men with black hair on their chins, came by Ban Dong one morning with their *smala* and asked for guides. There were four candidates for the work. Rather incredible promises of payment at the end of the journey brought out that response. Blay was chosen, as a matter of course; but when the Frenchmen said they would take Kroon as Blay's partner there was shaking of heads. Tu-op did no more than caution his son curtly.

"Remember, you have said he hates you as a crocodile hates his enemy. Keep an eye on the mud where he can hide."

So Kroon and Blay, watching each other like two panthers and hiding their hostility only from the Frenchmen—who see little enough of anything—set off to guide the exploring *smala* into the wilderness. The moon grew full and withered away again, twice. Tu-op found his son's wife mourning the departed one on a bright warm evening of changing weather and had to chastise her out of her melancholy. He beat her very gently. He knew Blay would return and it was unseemly to vex the gods of the forest with this uncalled-for grief, but he also missed the boy and wondered why he was so long absent.

The air of gloomy foreboding that fell on his own household was insupportable, but his discipline was futile against it. He took to spending the late afternoon hours with Irap—also old enough for wisdom—and they sat in Irap's doorway and reassured themselves by trying to guess what great glory Blay would bring back with him.

"He is my son," said Tu-op, "and I know he will make the Frenchmen pay a great price for saving their lives in the deep jungle."

Old Irap grinned.

"He is my daughter's husband and I also know his temper. He will return safe and we shall feel no shame for him."

"Shame? For my son?" Tu-op spat in contemptuous assurance.

It was in the midst of one of these solemnly cheerful exchanges that they saw the lost one coming down the village street. He was whole and happy. He greeted them with an upflung arm and a shout. He carried something very carefully in a long bag. He was alone.

Neither his father nor the father of his woman relaxed any dignity in greeting the returned hero. They blinked at him solemnly, embraced him with ceremonious restraint and permitted him to ask respectful questions about his home and how things had progressed in his absence. Then, as was decent, he came to matters of his own.

"Look!" he commanded, and pulled a fistful of glittering circles out of his bag. They were copper rings, shining like rings of moonshine on the river, ornaments enough for the arms of several generations of sons and daughters. Tu-op so far forgot himself as to jump up and down at Blay's side as he conducted him toward their own house, like a rheumy old pony that feels the spring.

His women folks were not so restrained and they shrieked with joy over his riches.

"And did Kroon also get as splendid pay as this?" asked his grandmother spitefully, after they were calm again.

"Certainly, the Frenchmen were just to both of us. What do Kroon's people think of it?" Blay said.

Kroon was not yet home, they told him.

"Not yet home?" cried Blay. "He left me three days ago in the brush. He would not come with me any farther and I traveled slowly because there was hunting—"

Certainly Kroon had not come home, nor did he come. Seven sunsets, then ten, the Ban Dong people waited, and there was no sign of him. Blay went over to Kroon's house where he did not expect to

be welcome and took his copper arm rings with him.

"Be happy," he said to Kroon's wife who scowled down at him from the top of the ladder. "When Kroon comes he will bring you a treasure like this for the greatness of your family."

He meant to quiet her natural uneasiness. But Kroon's woman spat words out at him that made Blay put his hand on his knife and roar back at her for silence.

"Murderer!" screamed Kroon's woman. "Murderer! He trusted himself in the brush with you—alone—and with treasure. Tell me where you hid him when you killed him! Tell me where his body was left to the birds . . ."

People came running to hear her from neighboring houses.

"The woman is crazy with waiting for her husband," said Blay when he found he could not still her clamoring.

He noticed there were some among them, the *pakams* who had been mates of Kroon, who did not shake their heads in agreement. A dull murmur, unfriendly and suspicious, came from the edges of the crowd.

"Is there any man who wishes to question me?" he asked, facing them.

No one answered. But that night they took the woman before the old chief to make her accusation, and the next morning the old chief sent a sneering friend of Kroon's family with a message for Tu-op. Would he surrender his son to be tried for murder or should they come and take him?

Tu-op did not answer a messenger who came in that spirit. Instead of speaking, he made a sign to his son to rest where he was and went off to the old chief's house slowly, thinking hard. The old chief had his reasons for not wanting to see Tu-op just then, chief of them being a natural desire not to struggle with a prickly argument.

But when the chief sent out word to the old *pakam* that he was very much occupied, Tu-op grunted noncommitally and sat down at the foot of the ladder where any one who went in or out would have to stumble over him. Whenever any one approached, Tu-op growled at him.

"Keep away! The wise old man is much occupied."

So at the end of the second hour the chief told him to come up. What was his business?

"The wife of Kroon the Surly has lost her mind," said Tu-op, "and in her ravings she has excited her family. Now they all believe that Blay, my son, is in some way to blame—"

"I know all this," said the old chief.

"Is it possible?" Tu-op was astonished. "Do you know also that a man of Kroon's kin came to my house with foolish talk about a summons—"

"I sent him," said the chief.

Tu-op smote his forehead.

"Impossible! You sent that swine to *me*, O wise old man?"

The old chief shuffled his useless crippled feet and spat uneasily.

"Make an end, Tu-op," he said. "They started home together laden with treasure and Blay came in alone. How can I refuse to try him by the *bidouway*?"

"So let it be," said Tu-op, "and the trial must start when the kinsman of Kroon can bring in his body to show that harm came to him."

"The trial will begin tomorrow, Tu-op".

"Behold the justice of Ban Dong!" cried the old hunter bitterly. "A man is accused and tried when his accusers can not even prove that the crime was done."

He rose and took his leave ceremonially. He paid no attention to a mumbled remark of his chief that a guilty man would certainly be clever enough to hide his victim away in the forest.

III

NEXT day the men of Ban Dong sat in sweaty silence and heard the old chief sing the chants of the *bidouway*, the ancient law which tells how men who are brothers in the tribe must protect each other against the common enemy and when they have grievances against each other must not take revenge and punish-

ment into their own hands. Kroon and Blay were protectors of each other in the brush, the old chief said, and Kroon had not returned.

There were *pakams* in the crowd who sympathized with Blay, but none who did not believe he had taken summary action against an old enemy because he had had a chance. They respected him for his manly slaying. They did not believe his cry of innocence. His punishment should be very light, they thought, and he should soon be forgiven and set free again. Kroon was a worthless, disagreeable and cantankerous person. The tribe, even his own family, were well rid of him.

"Have I a right now to speak?" asked Blay, when they had heard him incredulously and condemned him.

The old chief made a sign of permission.

"First," said the young hunter proudly, "I will give not half of my rightful share of the Frenchman's payment to the wife of Kroon as you have commanded me. I will give her all of it. I have no use for treasure which I can keep only under suspicion of a crime!"

"Yah!" cried Kroon's woman, ugly and avaricious in her triumph. "That is an admission of his guilt!"

"Silence!" roared the chief, whose voice came sometimes with thunderous vigor from his palsied lips. "You might return thanks to a man for giving up more than the law has required."

Kroon's woman shook her ugly head and leered at Blay when he extended the shining rings toward her.

"Bring them to me," she commanded.

Blay cast his treasure on the ground and turned his back on her.

"But my disgrace I accept with a heavy heart, O judge," he said. "I shall keep the terms of the sentence in honor and faithfulness. When Kroon comes back again—or proof comes that I am innocent of harming him—my reward will be the greater for having submitted?"

The chief nodded.

"That is so," he agreed.

"Then I am ready to go to prison," said Blay.

Instantly his grandmother and his wife set up a great cry. His stepmother began to weep silently because she loved him and had been hoping bravely that he would not be condemned. Tu-op, his father, stepped up to him and put a hand on his shoulder. Only those who stood near heard what Tu-op said, and to them it meant nothing.

"Ko-bo the crocodile," he whispered, "hides in the mud."

So Blay the valiant was put in a cage like a savage ape for the women to mock at, and the disgrace fell heavily on his family. Tu-op bore it with the sage wisdom which had helped him weather so many changes of fortune. His wife tried to comfort him.

"But I do not understand, Tu-op," she said to him, "what the crocodile has to do with it. You spoke to our son of Ko-bo when they led him away and last night when you were half asleep you talked. I was watching the moon through the door. It has a pleasant way of creeping around the posts and questioning me when I can not sleep. While I watched the moon I heard you speak and you said, 'Ko-bo! Ko-bo!' twice over—"

"Woman," said Tu-op, interrupting, "I am an old man and a foolish one or I would not talk to the moon rays when I am troubled. But I have lived too long to believe that my son would kill an enemy without good reason, or that, if he had good reason, he would lie. But the ways of crocodiles are not the ways of men."

His wife shook her head sadly and wondered whether trouble perhaps might be making the old man's mind wander. Next morning she was sure of it. Tu-op was gone. Mumbling of crocodiles, he had taken his great knife and a handful of rice wadded up in an old turban, and had slipped down his ladder before sunrise.

His wife woke early and when she saw the empty mat of her lord she went to the doorway. Most of Ban Dong was still asleep. Down the main lane of the village past her house walked a mother monkey leading its little one by the hand,

on the scent of its own morning meal, and watching with blinking, fierce little eyes for a sign of human waking. At sight of Tu-op's woman the monkey showed her teeth and dashed away, dragging the baby in the dirt.

The pigs under the house grunted amiably as they bestirred themselves. A buffalo, comfortably wallowing in a puddle, was like a gray rock until an enterprising rooster mounted the ridge of the rock and crowed. The rock moved indignantly and the rooster went squawking for its life. The domestic life of Ban Dong getting into action for another day.

Tu-op's wife, quick and confident in her motion in spite of her limp, looked about for signs of him. But she said nothing to the other two women still sleeping in the house. The grandmother was snoring monotonously and poor Blay's little wife was curled tight against the old woman as if needing comfort even in her dreams. Tu-op's wife took her water jug and slipped down toward the river.

Behind the far-off crest of the Yumbra Hills the sun was coming out of hiding. A saffron glow behind the mountains made them dark purple, clear edged but soft as the clouds. Through the opening of the trees cut by the wide river, she could see the mountains; she could see out of the jungle, and into the farthest reaches of the world. Her own village, where she had been a girl, was off there toward the blue hill, where Tu-op had found her and saved her from a savage elephant years and years ago. Perhaps if Tu-op were really gone she could find a way to go back there again and ask where her mother was buried.

An insistent hissing sound startled her. Then her name was called very cautiously. She could see no one.

"Here," said the voice of Tu-op. "Come down by the big tree if you are sure no one has seen you."

Very casually, she looked all about to to be certain they were alone, she moved down the bank. She could not see Tu-op and she pretended to be busy with her water jug while she listened.

"I have gone away because I have been crazed by grief for the unjust punishment of my son," he said. "Do you understand?"

She nodded as she stooped over the water.

"Let them all know that Tu-op who has been half-mad all his life has gone mad in earnest. Tell my mother first, she will help spread the news,"

"But you will come back, husband?"

There was a moment's silence and then his whisper had a teasing note—

"You want me back again, woman?"

Her eyes were on the far blue of the mountain toward her own people. But she put into the sudden gesture of her hand all the faithful love of her life.

"Yes," she answered.

Tu-op laughed quietly in his hiding place.

"Do not be afraid then. I know from Blay where he last saw his enemy. I am going to dig in the mud."

She heard a very swift, soft, brushing sound beyond the tree.

With her water pot poised skillfully, she limped back to the house and roused the grandmother. When the dreadful news was told, the last calamity of a house that seemed eternally smitten with calamities, the old woman asked:

"Haven't I always said he would go crazy sometime? It is the judgment of the gods on his head at last."

She broke out into lamentations which brought half the village to her door.

When the news reached the chief it was a tale of some interest, for by that time every one in Ban Dong knew that old Tu-op, the impious, had run amok and had been kept from killing his whole family only by the incredible bravery of his mother. Balked in filial murders, he had charged away into the forest and probably would never be heard of by the village again.

The gods were working together, it was remarked by Kroon's household, to punish the evil minded.

IV

TU-OP, struggling alone through the forest paths, would not have denied the accusation that he had an evil heart. "A heart full of rancor and hate and pain," he would have said, "like the heart of every other man—and full of love for his own also."

He had no clear road to the place where Blay had parted fatally with Kroon on their way home. It was half a day's travel straight toward the sun along the river, then two days with the sun on the right hand, until one came to a place where there was an island and beyond the island a great square rock—shaped like an elephant's skull, Blay said—jutting into the river's swift brown current and stirring a whirl pool.

After their quarrel, which Blay had recounted to his father very vaguely because when he tried to tell about it his neck swelled and his brave heart choked him, Kroon had taken his weapons and his copper treasures and gone around that great rock. That would be in the direction away from the mountain.

Tu-op traveled more slowly than his boy, but his stout old legs trotted through the open along the river and scrambled through the brush, bringing him to the great rock early on the third day. He came upon it suddenly around a bend of the stream. The place was peaceful now. The only living thing on the rock was a green bird which balanced there like a jewel spreading its glories in the tranquil sunlight.

Tu-op rested. He sat like a lizard and studied the rock as if the bare gnarled foot of Kroon the Surly might have been expected to leave a footprint in the stone. But when he had rested awhile he slapped a little of the weariness out of his leg muscles and went up a tree with agile monkey-cunning. From the upper fronds of his *areca* palm he surveyed the level green top of the forest, but it was like a swimmer trying to see the ocean by lifting his head out of water.

He did find a limestone rock, bigger than the one in the river. He climbed down and made for that rock, a small mountain raising its jagged crown free of the waving trees. Carefully, because his feet were not used to sharp stone edges, Tu-op clambered up the face of that hill until he was a hundred feet above the highest tree. The treetops swayed toward him like waves beating between his refuge and the farthest bulwarks of the Yumbra.

Tu-op was awed by the largeness of the world. He clung tightly with a vine root in each hand, squatting on his heels and peering straight ahead of him. He felt that the wind was blowing the soul out of his body; he was an old man and alone. He forgot Kroon and all his troubles. Blay and home and his woman—all those things were vague faintly fragrant memories. He trembled a little and closed his eyes in dizziness.

When he opened his eyes he kept his immobility for a moment and looked slowly around. Beside his left hand, coiled with exquisite neatness on a ledge of rock, was a coral-colored snake. Its narrow, diamond-shaped head was weaving slowly and its scarlet tongue flicked at him.

Only Tu-op's eyes moved. His right hand took a stronger hold on the thick root supporting him; his left hand was jerked back. The snake struck at nothing. Tu-op was swung clear away on the other side. He killed the venomous thing methodically with a stone and came back to his workday mood.

He looked out over the forest in every direction. Off toward the sunset there was one almost invisible sign. A haze, not much more than a thickening of the air, showed where there must be smoke. Tu-op climbed down and set off without any guide but his sense of space and direction through the thickest tangle of the brush.

When he came to the village late the afternoon of that day he walked boldly to the gate in the stockade that guarded its little cluster of stilted huts and made a sign of friendliness.

They asked him suspiciously who he was and where he was going and Tu-op replied that he was an old man without a home—the last man in his village, he said, and from a place many days journey to the south. Where was he going? He might stay there—if they wanted him. Well, they didn't want him. There were no diplomatic parleyings about that. They were not fond of wandering strangers and their most recent experience, they didn't mind saying, had not changed their opinions much.

Tu-op looked stupidly uninterested. The last stranger passing that way had stayed for a week and they had been kind to him, but he was so surly they had been compelled to drive him out. Tu-op, they said, had better stay outside the stockade. They could give him food and water.

"And am I to go somewhere else to find a home?" asked Tu-op, looking very feeble and tired.

He might go where the other stranger had gone, they said. Tu-op looked at them timidly and showed no interest in that suggestion. Couldn't he stay there? Then they all pressed around him and told him to go on, by all means, to the village where the other man had gone. It was three days' fast journey straight south. He could easily make it and they would—

Tu-op looked much abused. He showed no interest whatever in following the other stranger. What had he to do with surly men? He told them he would go north until he found men who knew what hospitality was. When he had gone a mile north he circled and went south as fast as he could go.

V

IT WAS part of Tu-op's nature to indulge in mystifications and ruses, which were only doubtfully necessary, whenever he met strangers; and he did not expect others to be any more simple than himself. He approached the new village, a large place, with great caution. He kept listening for hunting parties in the brush and at every turn in the path his sharp old eyes darted from side to side, examining every vine and twig for a trap.

If this village was at peace with all its neighbors all was safe. If not, some innocent looking liana strung across the path, ankle-high, might loosen a bent-back sapling which would crush him, or it might release a heavy pointed log that would drop down on him from the thick treetops. Tu-op was exploring what was to him an unknown and dangerous country. There was no commerce between the Ban Dong tribe and these villages, and hunting expeditions always give other settlements in the jungle a wide berth.

He came to a place where several small trails converged in one wide one. Just ahead of him across the wide path was a barrier, a fragile bamboo pole breast-high in the notches of two opposite bushes. It was a tribal boundary line and it meant that the village beyond was *dieng*—closed to strangers. He did not pause however; he only increased his caution.

Three or four yards farther on he stopped again, checking his step midway with one foot upraised in the air, like a stalking cat. The path ahead of him was perfectly silent. The green shadow was flecked with spots of light where the sun broke through the tangles overhead.

The air was scarcely moving and, because of the utter stillness of the place, it had that smell of dying things which is sometimes in the breath of the forest—an exhalation from the loam of dying leaves and flowers. Tu-op sniffed. His eye was on a single round leaf lying almost in the middle of the path. Other leaves were all along the edges of the trail. Something in the position of this one and the manner in which it had been broken from its stem made him draw back, stoop over it and lift it carefully with the point of his knife.

Underneath, just showing above the dirt, was the sharp point of a sliver of bamboo, set in the ground. On the nib of it was a dark poison-stain. Tu-op

grunted and replaced the leaf. Thereafter he went more slowly and his eyes watched all sides of the trail, above and along the ground. When a man barred his way farther on and shouted an angry challenge, he showed no surprize but squatted where he was and stuck his own knife in the ground in token of peace. He was an old man, he said, wandering friendless and alone, very tired and hungry.

"Yahhhh!" snarled the sentry. "The village is *dieng*. No strangers."

"I am starving."

"Go die somewhere else."

"I will die here and haunt your trails forever."

Tu-op looked very malign and dangerous for a moment, then began to plead again, launching into a long and fascinating tale of his troubles, which made the sentry first stop snarling active threats, then drop his spear point, then squat down beside Tu-op in the sun-flecked trail and ask excited questions.

"And did this witch-woman that you married have the power to change pigs into chickens?" he asked.

"No," answered Tu-op thoughtfully, "everything she changed was changed into something bigger—pigs into buffaloes, buffaloes into elephants—"

"We have a great chief in our village," boasted the sentry, "who has that power also. He came to us from a hundred days' march away, the other side of the Yumbra Mountain. We were going to kill him when he first came but he had a bright shiny thing—like the things the white men give you if you carry things for them through the forest—and he changed it into a whole handful of such bright shiny things before the eyes of our elders."

"Wonderful!" cried Tu-op. "With such a powerful chief why are you closing your village?"

"Because the chief has enemies and we are—why should I tell you? Are you one of his enemies?"

"Take me before him," replied Tu-op, "and then you will see. Here is my knife."

When Kroon the Surly, decorated like a great chief, saw the cringing Tu-op brought before his seat, he did not recognize him as an enemy. He refused to look at him or recognize him at all. When they pressed him to decide what they should do with this stranger he said it didn't matter—but he should not be allowed to escape. He should be kept for future investigation. Tu-op was led out of his presence and no one but Kroon himself saw a gleam of wicked defiance in the old man's eye.

Tu-op was fed. He crammed rice into his mouth with both hands and chewed enthusiastically. After he had slept off the effects of his feed, he lighted his pipe and selected a convenient house-post against which he could lean his back while he went over the situation. A few children of the village stood at a safe distance and stared at him while they sucked their thumbs. After an interval they began throwing things at him to see whether he would chase them. Nothing they did roused him from profound contemplation. Tu-op had a first degree problem on his hands.

VI

THE QUESTION as to how Kroon had succeeded in getting such prestige in a strange tribe did not hold him long. The people of this tribe, like all the people in the world outside of Ban Dong, were stupid. That was all. He could not credit Kroon with having planned all this out in advance. It was impossible to believe that a surly, dull and resentful fool would have deserted his own tribe and family and struck off into dangerous territory with the definite intention of trying any such venture.

No, Kroon had left Blay on the return journey from the exploring trip with quite different ideas, Tu-op was sure of that. And his intentions had been unfriendly to Blay. Ko-Bo the crocodile always works under cover of mud or water—never in sight of his prey. When he seeems to be carelessly asleep he is most dangerous.

It would be useful first to find out exactly what Kroon was planning to do.

That would be only the beginning of the business, however. Kroon as a mighty man of a distant tribe was of no use to Tu-op, he wanted Kroon back in Ban Dong to prove himself alive and release Blay from a shameful punishment. Also, Tu-op thought in passing, to beat Kroon's wife; she needed beating very badly. It resolved itself down to this discouraging proposition: How could an old man, suspected of hostility, and without any friends in the place, get this admired rascal away from these people and home again against his will?

Tu-op's pipe was out and he had no more tobacco. Thinking without smoking was almost impossible so he stuck the pipe in his hair and begged one of the children, a little girl who had lingered on when the others ran away to more exciting pleasure, for a chew of betel. She was a demure young lady of perhaps six years. She declared herself his first ally by producing a fresh chew from the waist of her garment and handing it to him with a betel-reddened smile. Tu-op guessed that she might be a daughter of importance by the fact that—at her age—she wore any garment at all.

"Your father is a great chief, my child," he asserted confidently.

"My father is a great chief," she repeated after him, grinning wider, but added, "and he hates strangers because they are evil men."

"Not all of them," Tu-op protested.

"Oh yes, old man, all of them. My father says so because this new stranger who has come to the village has robbed my father of things that are his right."

A look of alarm spread suddenly over her small face. She seemed to recollect that she had been forbidden to say such things and she ran away like a little brown rabbitt.

Tu-op's estimate of Kroon's intelligence was justified in the next event. Kroon might have kept himself out of the reach of Tu-op's searching conversation, but he did not. Perhaps a trace of homesickness in his unfriendly soul overcame his prudence. He had the old man brought into his presence again, in the splendid house where he lived alone, on the pretext of examining him.

The two men who brought Tu-op to the foot of the ladder made a sign of respect and waited there. Tu-op scrambled up the ladder and squatted without invitation on the bamboo floor, selecting his place carefully near a crack through which excess betel could be decorously spat. The hut was new and clean and, because there were no woman there—since Kroon dined elsewhere—the air inside was free of blinding smoke. Kroon was crosslegged on a new grass mat.

"Tell me the news of my people while you have breath left in you, Tu-op," he commanded, without parleying.

"I have great news of them for you, Kroon. And when I go back to Ban Dong I will have great news of you to tell everybody."

"You are not going back to Ban Dong, Tu-op."

"That will be as the gods will. Do you love me as a brother, that you want me to stay and share your honors with you?"

"Yahhhh! In a few day you will try to escape and my sentries will kill you while you run."

Tu-op blinked at him. His next question was insinuating.

"My story of your new glory will be wonderful, Kroon. They will be proud of you—when you return."

"Neither you nor I will ever see Ban Dong again," Kroon hunched his shoulder nervously and took a fresh leaf-wrapped mouthful of betel.

"That would be a calamity. There is now a great injustice being done in our home and you are the only one who can right it." Tu-op saw a gleam in Kroon's shifty eyes. "My son is in prison because you have not come back. They think he killed you for your share of the Frenchman's treasure. Until they see you again he will have to suffer."

Kroon smiled and hugged himself, winding his scrawny arms around his

bare torso and rocking back and forth. He was too much amused to see the illumination which glittered for a moment in Tu-op's wrinkled face, or the look of confirmed hate which even so crafty a man could not suppress in that moment. His smile widened into a foolish laugh.

"My son is an honest and decent man," said Tu-op. "He suffers in this disgrace."

"Let him rot in the cage like dead tiger bait!" cried the surly one, changing from laughter to a snarl of satisfied cruelty. "Let him yelp and howl and curse. Neither you nor I will ever come back to explain what happened to me. I am dead, Tu-op, dead! Blay murdered me and Blay will pay for it, Yahh! What a great happiness at last to bring him down! He scorned me. He laughed at me. He made me a fool. One day perhaps, when he is gray and shrivelled up with being in a cage, I will send him a message so he can know who was the fool —he or I."

"That is why you did not come back then?"

"Of course. Am I a fool, Tu-op, am I a fool?"

"You are a crocodile," answered Tu-op. "But the sun still rises on Blay and the tale is not yet finished."

"What can you do, old man? If you escape me—which you will never do—you could only go and tell them what they will not believe. If you come back with force I will have my people here drive you out and none would get a chance to see me. If you try to touch me—" He whistled suddenly through his teeth. Two men and two spear points came into the room. Tu-op did not move and Kroon laughed again. "You see, Tu-op? Go and pray to the spirits of your disgraced ancestors so you will be ready when I decide to send you to them."

VII

TU-OP left the hut with more dejection in the droop of his shoulders and in the hangdog look on his face than he had ever really felt in his life. He gave Kroon his money's worth of triumph. Once out of sight he reached mechanically for the pipe stuck in his hair and drifted toward the center of the village. The villagers, more or less occupied with their own affairs and managing to keep busy with gossip and gambling if they had nothing else to do, paid little attention to him. He was thought to be only some old dodderer, wandered away from his own tribe perhaps, and too senile to find his way back. He could be put out of his misery anytime; it didn't much matter.

He moved among them stupidly. The first sign of life he gave was when the little girl who had given him a share of her betel leaf went by. He called. She gave him a frightened glance and ran, but he watched to see up which ladder she scrambled and that was all he wanted to know.

In the dusk, when all the villagers were busy with their rice pots, he came to the foot of that ladder. An old woman answered his call and put all the venom possible into asking what on earth he wanted.

"I am looking for a *pakam*," said Tu-op. "I am a wanderer and I can not find anybody in this village who seems to have any sense. They sent me to one they called their new chief and I found him a fool. Is there no one else?"

"Sssssh," warned the old woman. "Come up the ladder quickly."

Inside he found the little girl and the little girl's father, who was sulking in a corner as he had sulked for days. On the basis of a few roundabout but expressive phrases Tu-op and this disgrunted chief came to a sympathetic understanding. Tu-op was supplied with tobacco and betel and rice and the sulking one growled:

"I have warned my people that this brazen fellow is evil. When were we ever so taken in by a stranger before? Moon madness! There must be some curse on my people when they forsake my advice and let a stranger, wandering in from nowhere, get such power."

"When I first saw you," said Tu-op, "I knew you were the rightful counselor of

this tribe." He had really not seen the *pakam* at all as yet, for the house was lighted only by a smudge and his host was a menacing somberness in the corner. "And as a matter of truth—is any one hearing us who can not be trusted?" He looked about anxiously. "I know who this insolent one really is. Listen. In my wanderings I passed by a tribe called Ban Dong. They live over toward the Yumbra and they are very rich in buffaloes and elephants—"

"We have three elephants here," said his host.

"In Ban Dong they have four tens of elephants," answered Tu-op, holding up his fingers to make the count. "They have every kind of riches and when I was there I heard that the son of a chief had run away. He was a great fool, they said, and wilful. He quarreled with his father who rules Ban Dong and ran away. Now his father will give him three elephants to any one who will bring him back."

"Three elephants?"

"Yes, three. All bulls and perfect from toenail to top."

"And this escaped one doesn't want to go back?"

"Why would he be staying here in your village if he was willing to go back?" asked Tu-op.

The sullen *pakam's* breath came out in a snort, a sign of resolution.

"Three elephants, all bulls and perfect," Tu-op repeated, but the other interrupted him.

"Stay in my house," he commanded. "You are my friend. I am going now to see if I have any other friends left among my people."

VIII

"ARE YOU such a fool as to be taken in by the stories and the magic of this fellow you know nothing about?" That was the question by which Thut, as Tu-op's new friend was named, began to undermine the prestige of the haughty Kroon. There was one *pakam* of the village who smarted still under an insult to his prowess which Kroon had recklessly offered. There was another who had offered Kroon one of his daughters as a wife and Kroon, for no reason which he could explain, had refused the bride. There were these rifts in Kroon's prestige and Thut played on them.

After all, he had his old accustomed honors as a resource. Kroon was inexperienced in the politics of being a great man, and had no resource but impudence. The trick of multiplying the copper circles by a crude sleight of hand had worked once, it could not be relied on forever.

Suspicions and uncertainty began to grow swiftly by contagion. Kroon first felt the change when an expected tribute of food failed to reach his house at the appointed time. He asked questions and was evasively answered.

"Am I a chief," shouted Kroon, "or am I a slave?"

"The chief of my tribe is Thut," answered the servant with embarrassed resoluteness.

He was standing under the edge of Kroon's porch. The water pot Kroon threw at him was dodged with a jerk of his head.

"Bring Thut to me!" Kroon shrieked, beside himself with rage and the fear that this revolt would spread unless imperiously checked.

He stormed on his porch while the servant watched him carefully for more missiles, and others gathered in the sunshine and observed with solemn curiosity the gyrations and curses with which he lashed himself into action.

"Bring this Thut to me," he yelled. "Bring him before a chief and let him find out who has the power!"

No one went to bring Thut. They might be afraid of his stranger but they were also afraid of their old leader. Kroon's rage was not mere pretense. He lashed himself like a beast, because only murderous rage could drive the sudden fear out of his heart. He caught up a lance and leaped from the edge of his

porch straight at the heads of the gaping crowd. They fled, trampling on each other, and let him fall on all fours in the dirt.

All around him at a safe distance they stood. They knew what they were about to see, a spectacle which only very few fortunate villages see more than once in a life time, a fight for rule. Toward the house of Thut went the invader, his long lance in his hand, his oxhide target on his left arm, his *coupe-coupe* handy at his shoulder.

Thut came to the door of his house unarmed but for his knife and unprepared for this sudden enemy.

Treacherously Kroon leaped forward and threw his lance. That was his first mistake. Thut saw the glint of polished wood in the sunshine and swayed to one side. The lance struck through the wall of the hut, and a shrill childish scream came from inside. Without looking back to see how much his little girl had been harmed, but knowing it was her voice, Thut gave a roar like a wounded tiger, plucked the lance from the wall and leaped to the ground.

It was for the moment lance against knife. Kroon had his carefully worked-up fury, and his new won honor was at stake. The rightful chief had a more desperate anger—with the scream of his child in his ears—and he had his lost prestige to get back again. They were evenly matched, except for the fact that Thut now had the long lance. Kroon made a motion as deft as it was needful and the lance shaft was cut in two. Then it was knife to knife.

The people of the village circled around the fighters and took it calmly for granted that this was war to the death. If they had any wish at all it was for Thut to win, because Thut had been a good chief in the past. But they feared the stranger and respected his prowess, and if he could defeat Thut, then he had a right to claim first place. In any case, a good fight was a good fight; they stood by.

It was not a fight to the death however, for Kroon alive was worth much more to their chief than Kroon dead. This would have been a serious handicap in Kroon's favor except for a secret thought which worried Kroon's mind. He was not sure he would be allowed by the villagers to fight this out, man to man. He feared that a remnant of loyalty in the breast of some *pakam* of this crowd would make him leap in to Thut's rescue. He had to keep half an eye on the circle. Their two knives rang heavily against each other and they danced back and forth."

"Son of a wild pig," yelled Kroon, swinging a mighty blow, "take that!"

Thut took it on the side of his own knife expertly and in return surprized Kroon by aiming not at his head and throat but at his legs. Kroon hopped aside, disconcerted. Again Thut swung at his legs. It left Thut's own more vulnerable parts exposed but it worried Kroon at first. He had been nipped twice in the thigh by the point of Thut's *coupe-coupe* before it occurred to him to counter to Thut's throat. His swift blow might have been the end of the battle—but just as he swung it there was a sudden cry from among the spectators.

"Look out, Kroon!"

It was his own name—in the very accent of his own people. He half-turned, looking for an attack from a new quarter. The side of Thut's heavy knife came down on his head with a crunching thump and he rolled over senseless.

Thut, hot and panting, a slaver of crazy anger in his betel-red lips, turned toward his people.

"Is there any other," he demanded, "who cares to challenge Thut?"

No one replied.

"And who was it that cried a warning to this rash fool? I will put him here in the dirt with his friend."

But the man who had shouted at Kroon held his peace.

Tu-op knew it would be difficult to explain, especially while Thut was in this lather of triumph, that the cry of warning to Kroon had been an intentional and successful stroke for Thut's own victory. Tu-op was silent.

"Tie this fellow up," commanded Thut. "He is an imposter and a runaway. I am going to take him back to his people and claim the reward that they are foolish enough to pay for his worthless carcass."

Kroon stirred a little and moaned as they tied him. Thut's little girl came trembling to the door of the house. She had been frightened by the spear thrust through the wall, not hurt, and her shuddering now was as much pride and fear.

"Three elephants—all perfect—will be no more than you deserve, O mighty chief," observed Tu-op to Thut from among the anonymous crowd.

Thut swelled and did not bother to answer.

IX

THUT chose seven of his men to make the expedition to Ban Dong.

"There will need to be three good elephant drivers," he explained to Tu-op, "myself and two others, and I will need at least four men to carry whatever else they give me as a reward for bringing back their runaway."

Tu-op scratched his head sagely.

"They will need to be very good drivers too, because the three best elephants in Ban Dong may not like being taken from their home by men they do not know."

"Humph!" Thut grunted his assurance on that point. "I have caught two wild ones myself and tamed them. It probably seems difficult to you because you are an old man and timid. Have you ever ridden elephants yourself?"

Through Tu-op's mind went visions of a gray procession—Hee-way the perfect tusker with the twisted tail, elephants marching in single file out of Ban Dong for the hunt, elephants met face to face in the green forests, elephants tamed, elephants killed even and the curse of the god of all the elephants, Nget-Ngwal, once defied over the body of his woman. He shook his head.

"No," he answered. "Never."

"And what share of this reward are you going to claim for yourself?" asked Thut. "I will pay you one jar of rice wine and if you want to spend the few days you have left in life in the comfort of my village you will be kindly treated here."

"That is too much," said Tu-op. "Let me join in your feasts once or twice and then I will go on—"

"Where is your home?" asked Thut with what was almost kindness. He was ready to show gratitude, now that he was sure it would cost him little.

"My home?" Tu-op looked pensive. He waved one thin arm toward the east where the Yumbra range, invisible from this forest clearing, lifted its blue height into the air. "My village was destroyed by a great sickness. My wife and my sons and my daughters—all my people died one after another. My friends who did not die knew that place was accursed and moved on, but I was left behind. I followed them—" he seemed overcome for the moment with his melancholy fate—"and when another great sickness struck them in their new home they blamed me for it and drove me out. Since then I have been a wanderer."

He went on and elaborated with great skill and deep emotion the story of his unhappiness. Thut gave him a half disdainful sympathy. Such things might happen to ordinary men.

They marched on through the forest, retracing the steps by which Tu-op had found his way from Ban Dong in pursuit of Kroon. Thut led the way with Tu-op. Two of his men, with Kroon between them, marched just behind, and the other five followed. They did not love spending nights in the brush but they avoided other villages for fear the precious prisoner might be taken from them.

Kroon had scarcely spoken since his defeat. He retired into his natural surliness. Occasionally he tested the bands around his wrists with a slow pressure to see whether they could be budged. Tu-op kept away from him, not because he feared a possible escape or any revenge Kroon was likely to devise, but

because he hid not want Thut to guess that Kroon knew him.

"Are we not getting near this tribe of Ban Dong?" Thut demanded every evening—every morning, too, and sometimes during the moist green days.

"It takes time," answered Tu-op. "We are still far from the place." In fact they were only a few hours' journey from his home before he admitted even that they were approaching. "A few miles more," he said. "Perhaps tomorrow I may see the signs that will show the place."

And that night while Thut slept, uneasy with his dreams of grandeur, parading three perfect bull elephants back through the forest to his people, Tu-op rolled noiselessly away from the fire and sped on his limping old feet toward Ban Dong.

He came first to the little open meadow where the village men and maidens have always gone to sing love songs in the evening. Those who are only dalliers soon have their fill of music and go back into the houses to sleep. No one has ever explained in Ban Dong why the Great Lord who stalks the forest never threatens lovers in the meadow. That is one of the dispensations of the spirits who rule life.

When Tu-op came close to the clearing he circled. It was very late. Almost no one was there. But one wailing solo beneath the edge of the largest banyan tree betrayed late devotees of love and music. The solo was interesting. Its impromptu phrases had something to say about a very lovely and desirable widow. Tu-op was interested in widows. He crept closer.

Her husband was gone far away where no man knew what had befallen him. It was an unhappy fate to meet death in the jungle and leave behind this lovely and desirable one. She must not suffer loneliness. She must not lack for a brave *pakam* as her defense and her friend. The singer was not very adept at invention. He sang the old songs with shrill passion and then chanted his personal applications tonelessly. Tu-op came closer.

Widows are shameless creatures, Tu-op was thinking, shameless and without gratitude. Suppose it were his own woman there in the darkness listening to folly. Tu-op spat. All a man had to do was to go away for a while and he would find out how little his woman really cared for him. He put his hand on his knife and shifted his feet.

"Are you not lonely for a man? A man to keep your riches safe—"

The lover and his lady were startled by a sudden laugh from the jungle near them. Tu-op had seen the woman. It was not his woman. It was the wife of Kroon. Rich now with Blay's scornful gift, she was being pursued as she had never been before, even in the comparative freshness of her youth. Tu-op's laugh was like the mocking of the forest spirit. The lovers shrieked and ran and Tu-op, smiling in relief, went on toward the village.

His own woman left her mat that night in response to a call no one else heard and had a whispered talk with a visitor no one else saw.

X

WHEN the hour of the "sun in the treetops" came, Tu-op was sleeping again in Thut's camp.

"Today," he predicted, when they woke him, "you shall come in to Ban Dong and claim the great reward. The old chief will be foolish with joy when he sees his son."

Thut was still a little dim-eyed from heavy dreaming but he stirred himself to smile in anticipation. As they went on he began to gallop in his steps like a skittish pony. He pranced and shouted.

"Three elephants—all perfect, old man? All bulls?"

"Three elephants, O wise and mighty Chief," answered Tu-op. "The path divides there for the village of Ban Dong."

But as they came nearer, Tu-op went more slowly.

"Perhaps it would be better, O Chief," he suggested, "if I did not present myself

at your side when you march up to Ban Dong and claim your elephants. If I am beside you they may think I should have some share in the rewards and—"

"Enough!" Thut showed his intelligence and his manhood in the quickness of his decision. "Fall behind, old man. I will go first." He turned toward the three retainers who were bringing up the prisoner. "Take care there, you fools!"

Kroon had ceased to sulk. Seeing himself almost in sight of home, not knowing what the end of this might be, and sure only that it meant no good to him, he made a wild dash to escape. He got away in spite of his bonds for a blind plunge into the brush. But the tangled vines held him back and Thut's men were on him like hounds. They sat on him while he worked his infuriated face full of jungle dirt and cursed.

"That old man is a liar!" he yelled. "He is leading you into danger. The men of Ban Dong do not know me. They will pay you nothing. He is a liar! A liar!"

"Is that not what he would be expected to say?" asked Tu-op, looking down on Kroon's futile spasms gently.

"Of course," Thut agreed. "He does not want to be taken back. Carry him."

Kroon went forward into his home, trussed to a pole like a pig. Tu-op, as they marched into the village, vanished behind them into the brush beside the path.

XI

THE MIDDAY laziness, the very reasonable concession to jungle heat which is customary for beasts and men, had fallen upon Ban Dong. Besides, the tribe was at peace with the known world and the village was not *dieng;* strangers could come freely. Polite strangers would have come quietly also, but Thut was in no mood for politeness. He summoned the men of Ban Dong to come and see the prize he had brought them.

His savage shouts echoed along the lanes and stirred the aged chief of the village from a pleasant, dreamless snoozing. His temper was not good when suddenly awakened. He inquired of the surrounding attendants, as sleepy and outraged as himself, what they meant by their infernal impudent racket. One of them replied that some *pakam* had got *biol* and gone mad. He was sent to find out the details.

In an obscure corner of the village, Blay, the son of Tu-op, locked up in his prison, grunted and rolled over. What happened to the rest of the world had ceased to interest him much. They were all a crowd of fools, easily deceived, malicious against a good man and a mighty *pakam,* preferring to believe evil rather than uncertain good.

"Stir yourself, my son," said a voice at his prison door.

It was impossible but it was true, nevertheless. That voice was the voice of Tu-op. He was hacking at the fastenings of the bamboo gate which held Blay in. His father—returned from his crazy flight into the brush many many days ago!

"Come quickly," Tu-op whispered, as his son groaned with the pain of long-cramped legs while sliding down the notched bamboo to the ground. "There is something you will enjoy seeing. Hurry."

In another hut a woman who had been spending the last hour in a vain attempt to make an ugly face look young and pleasing was equally annoyed by the outburst of shouts outside. Before a mirror made of a polished scrap of tin, an abandoned can from some passing expedition, she was rearranging her scraggly black hair. It was well greased; it should have been more amenable to her anxious plying. One black, sharpened tooth was loose and looked out of line when she smiled and revealed the betel-bloodied cave of her mouth. She was trying to decide whether to pull that tooth out or try to file it down to its proper proportions. A bigger knob of wood in her left earlobe might help a little . . .

Why in the name of all the ghosts was

that wild man yelling so? The wife of Kroon the Surly gave up her worship of the Moi Aphrodite and went to her door. Everybody was going toward the river by the house of the old chief. She gave her *sampot* a twist and slid down among them. She bore herself haughtily, as became a rich and much-wooed widow. She yapped at those who jostled her and when she saw the woman of old Tu-op, a widow of very different standing, she elbowed in ahead of her.

The chief had been carried to the edge of the river by the entrance to the village, where Thut and his seven men had put the trussed-up Kroon down on the earth. The chief waited, backed by his pushing chattering people, for the stranger to explain. No one paid much attention to the prisoner and he, dumb with rage, kept his face turned from them.

"I have brought him back, O Chief of Ban Dong," cried Thut, holding up his arms.

"You are welcome, stranger," answered the old chief mildly bewildered. "But who is it you have brought back?"

"I have brought back your son and I claim the great reward—three elephants—all perfect. Three bull elephants—"

"I have no son, stranger." The chief drew back in his chair from Thut's enthusiastic gestures.

"I have restored him to you—the one who ran away—the one you have sought everywhere."

"I and my people are at peace with the world," answered the chief. "I have no son and have never had one. No one is missing from Ban Dong except one old man called Tu-op who has defied the gods for years and has at last gone mad with his misfortunes."

Thut put down his arms and the wild eagerness in his face was guttered like a torch in the wind.

"Do men of Ban Dong lie?" he asked.

"Some of them, doubtless," replied the chief without resentment.

"Then who is this?" Thut prodded his prisoner with his great toe.

"How can I answer that?" The chief maintained his mild solemnity. "Turn him over and let me see."

But as Thut's men stooped over Kroon's bent figure, a yell of astonishment and recognition went up from the crowd.

"It is Kroon!"

His widow yelled louder than anybody, and there was no joy in her acknowledgement. Not even her most disappointed suitor, seeing a chance at her great riches snatched from him, put more disgust and fury into his remarks than she did. Nobody in fact seemed pleased that Kroon was returned to them except the women of Tu-op's household, his woman and the wife of his son, and the old grandmother. They were too overcome with unexpected relief to make any noise whatever.

"You know him then?" asked Thut, recovering a little.

"O, yes. We know him. He is a member of our tribe. We thought he had been murdered. But he is not important."

"My reward then? Three elephants?"

The chief laughed and ordered his bearers to take him to the other end of the village. Thut followed him for a step or two.

"My three elephants? How am I to be paid for my trouble? My elephants? What shall I do with your man?"

"Leave him and perhaps his women will take him home," answered the old chief. "I am going to undo a great injustice."

Thut saw all the people of Ban Dong going away from him. What the chief had said was being repeated among them and they wanted to see Blay released from prison. They were gone like a herd of elephants when a man's scent is in the breeze. Thut looked down at Kroon. The completely cowed prisoner turned a terrified eye away from him. For a moment Thut glared around, remembering that there had been an old man mixed up in this business, an old man of gentle insinuating ways and persuasive tongue. But the old man was not available.

He leaped upon Kroon and began to hammer him. His retainers helped, al-

though no help was necessary, and their fists and feet, the handles of their knives, and the butt-ends of their hefty spears rattled on the head and body of the helpless Kroon. He howled for mercy, for help from the friends who were running away from him, he cursed and cried, but the battering went on until they were tired. Thut gave him a final kick with a bare but none the less tough and formidable big toe.

"And if I could find that lying old man," he said, "I'd give him worse!"

The lying old man, with his son at his side, was watching from the shadow of the deep brush along the river a few yards away. He nudged Blay and smiled.

"Is Kroon a fool?" he said "Is he a crocodile as I told you long ago?"

"He's Ko-bo, sure enough," answered Blay, "but he is tied up now and beaten into a pulp. Shall I beat him some more?"

"He wouldn't feel it now," said Tu-op. "Better wait."

The afternoon sun glistened on the mud of the river bank. Tu-op and his son were very still. They had too much to talk about; neither one wanted to begin. On the other side of the village arose a clamor; evidently the crowd had discovered Blay gone from his prison just when the old chief had arrived to free him. That was unimportant to Blay; explanations could be made later.

"I think I will go home now," said Blay. "My woman will be scared."

"Good." said Tu-op, "but look there —in the river!"

The drowsy hot stillness lay over the brown water, pressing down the ripples by the bank. One black lump was moving slowly across the stream, breaking the glistening surface. They both recognized it as a snout. Ko-bo, the real Ko-bo, the treacherous, dull-witted, saurian whose habits were so much like those of the fallen Kroon, was coming over to investigate the bundle of human flesh on the shore.

Blay watched death come slowly toward the man who had caused him so many days of bitterness.

"Go pull him out of danger," said Tu-op.

"But why?"

"Hurry, my son. He is a beaten enemy and a beaten enemy is a great luxury to be enjoyed for a long time. Pull him up out of danger and let us go home in peace."

A Story of the Grand Banks Fishermen

By KENNETH PAYSON KEMPTON

SEA MAGIC

"RACE you home, you!"

No answer.

"Come on!" Over the water the hoarse voice in the megaphone boomed, half a challenge, half a prayer. "First to pass Burnt Island Light gets the other's lay of his catch. Start in ten minutes. Wha's that?"

Silence.

Then the big bulk of Rodney Greene, braced on the *Wizard's* rail, would swell bigger. Out of the megaphone would pour a very torrent of sound.

"We-ell, you little lopped off son of a mud spawned, yellow bellied sculpin! D'you hear me talk or have you lost ears as well as guts? What I say, will you or won't you?"

"Oh, all right!" Jeff Lowe, stung beyond endurance, would wearily snap at last. And in ten minutes off they'd go, lee rails under and every stitch of canvas hard as rock, slashing and pounding across the wind torn Bay of Fundy for home.

That's the way it always started. And almost always Rodney's schooner won.

"It's the boats, Rod," Lowe would sigh, paying up. "Somehow my *Witch* don't—"

"You're a liar, Jeffrey Lowe," the other skipper would cut in, safe in the knowledge of his fifty pound, six inch advantage. "It ain't the boats and you know it. It's the men that sail 'em."

Was Rodney right? For a fact, Jeff's *Witch* and his *Wizard* were alike as two thole pins. They had been laid down in the same yards, from the same blueprints, for the same firm. Look at them bow on, or broadside, or in any position that hid the nameplates on their sleek black sterns,

and you thought you were seeing double. Nor was this likeness merely a matter of hull, spars, and canvas.

To the last detail of gear those schooners were identical; even their fittings below, their cabin tables, the bunks in their forecastles, the pots and pans hanging to their galley bulkheads. Why, it's common knowledge that Louis Nap, Canuck cook of the *Wizard*, coming aboard one dark night when the two vessels lay at anchor, got into what he thought was his galley and cooked a chowder and two pans of biscuit, and turned in to wake up next day aboard the *Witch* a hundred miles out to sea!

But was Rodney Greene right?

For another fact, there surely was an amazing sight of difference between those two skippers. Cap'n Rod Greene was a fine figure, a big broad, upstanding hunk of a man with a ruddy face and a heavy jaw, a blazing eye and a voice like a brass band. Beside him, Jeff looked a wisp, a shadow—short, scrawny, his lean features weathered and lined, his eye a washed out gray, his voice—when he spoke at all, which was very seldom—mild and even.

Rod seemed born lucky. His people had money; when his father, old Irvah Greene, died, something like forty thousand came to Rodney. Soon afterward the firm that had built the *Witch* and the *Wizard*, trawlers for the Banks trade, went broke. Rod stepped in and got the *Wizard* for two bars of a song. He had wanted both boats. On a pinch he had money enough for both. But he wasn't quite quick enough.

Jeff's dad kept the general store, which was mortgaged to the faded awning over its door. Jeff had worked since he was fifteen, first running errands, berrying, later hauling lobsters and fishing. He'd saved a thousand dollars. When the Banks firm went up the creek, Jeff ran two miles across country to the Lincoln National at the county seat. Panting a little, he asked Treasurer, Jud Moseley, for eighteen thousand, "at six per cent.—on my note." The banker was so surprised to hear Jeff talk that he gave him the money, on condition he would insure the *Witch* for every cent of her purchase price. Jeff promised with a nod, scratched his name, ran the two miles home. Half an hour later the *Witch* was his.

That night Rodney was down at the store hiring hands and shouting round how he was going to clean up a million. As usual, Jeff never said a word.

Jeff didn't want to show Rodney where he got off. He wanted to be left strictly alone to earn his six per cent. on eighteen thousand, and maybe a little over, in peace.

But this the fates and Rod would not allow. It seemed to Jeff that as far back as he could remember, he'd always heard that arrogant, taunting challenge in his ear, "Race you home, you!" After school, when their road was the same. Now on the Banks, in harbor, at Fell's Landing getting bait. "Race you home, you! Come on!" Drat the man! He was race crazy . . .

So the *Witch* and the *Wizard* clung together like a magnet and a nail. Folks ashore remarked it.

"What a friendship!" they'd say. "Richest and poorest in town, too. Like a couple kids, can't let each other out of sight. Like blood brothers."

Folks ashore were as near right as they are usually. There was certainly no real enmity between those two. But it should be remembered that Rod Greene had wanted both schooners. Perhaps he hadn't lost sight of the desire, either.

AT ANY rate this was the situation, one foggy night in late November, when the *Witch* and the *Wizard*, together as usual, crept up the Narrows and into Fell's Cove, and berthed on opposite sides of the wharf to get their bait. Sim Fell was waiting for them. Sim's gang took the schooners' lines and then moved at once to the kegs of herring up-ended in long rows on the wharf. Flares were lighted, dispelling fog and darkness. The kegs came rumbling aboard. And

the two crews, idle now till dawn, sauntered ashore.

That is, they sauntered up the wharf and stood in little groups wondering what to do. Fell's Landing is no more than that. A wharf, a ramshackle warehouse, Sim's shanty in which one light glows feebly, and a ghostly pale clamshell road running inland between solid black ranks of spruces. Not a wild prospect, you'd say, for forty hard worked men on shore leave.

But some one suggested the movies! True enough, five miles up that road lay Hebron. Lights, people, a picture house, a place where you could eat steak and pie. Sure, some one said, this Hebron was quite a town. Early yet. Phone in Sim's shack. Why not call up and see if they had any cars they'd send over?

Just then Rodney strode up, took command of the situation.

"What's this?" He shouldered into the crowd. "Movies? Surest thing you know. Sam, you run up and phone. But there's just one thing I want—Where's that Jeff?"

Everybody looked for Cap'n Jeff Lowe. He was discovered on the outskirts, where he'd been standing inconspicuously, lost behind burly shoulders in the gloom. But the effect was as if he'd been hiding. Rod's masterful voice increased it.

"Jeff! Hey, you!" The crowd made way for Jeff Lowe, closed in again behind him. The big bulk of Rodney towered over him in that thick circle of shadowy men. "Now see here." Rodney put a hand on Jeff's shoulder. You could take it for a sign of friendship. Or you could take it that Jeff wasn't going to get away.

"Before we kite off to the movies, there's something I want to settle."

Jeff wriggled uncomfortably. He knew what was coming. In the pause you could hear the rumble of those kegs moving steadily aboard.

"Here's your *Witch* and my *Wizard*," Rod went on grandly, "two best schooners in the Banks fleet, laying here all cozy ready to go. We been having little brushes and sprints here and there, all friendly and nothing lost either way. But what I was telling the boys at supper, what about a real race to settle this matter once for all?"

Jeff lifted his head slightly.

"What I mean by real race?" Rodney shouted as if something had bitten him. "Why, I mean a race that *is* a race. I mean, start right from this wharf tomorrow daylight. I mean, race out to La Have Bank. I mean, race fishing—each man to lay four sets of trawls, two for his forehold and two for his main, and start home soon's the last fish is aboard. And I mean, race home, all the way—and the first man to pass Burnt Island Light wins. That's what I mean."

The crowd stirred. Some one chuckled. Make a game of the whole thing, eh? "That's the talk, Rod!" On the edge of the throng, a man began to clog neatly, with passionate fervor.

These sounds died as the crowd realized that Jeff Lowe hadn't said a word. The little man stood motionless, Rod's hand still gripping his shoulder; with head bent sidewise, he still looked steadily up into Rod's face, as if waiting. At that Rod laughed.

"I know what he wants, boys. Doggone him! You don't catch Jeff Lowe going into something *for love*. He wants to know what's on it!"

The laugh spread round.

"Wha' d'you think of that! Sly bird, our Jeff! Yessir."

"Well, we'll tell him. We'll put the stakes on this race high enough to please anybody. What I say, have every man aboard the boat that gets licked fork over his lay of the catch to a man on the boat that licks. And as for the skippers, what I say, let him put up his *Witch* on this race, and I'll do the same with my *Wizard*. Wha's that?"

For Jeff Lowe had shaken his head. Somebody near enough to see that quick negative said hoarsely—

"He ain't goin' to do it!"

The effect was electric. A low catcall,

a hooted murmur, a snort of disappointment—and then above the vague stirring Rodney Greene was bawling words, words in a rush of scorn, and shaking what his right fist held, back and forth in jerks and vicious snatches to every phrase.

"Won't, huh? He won't! The little rat! Get me to bet with him and then lay down and curl up! Yellow, that's him! Yah! Mammy told me not to! Skunk! Yellow-belly! By Jude, I'm a good mind to—"

Nobody found out what Rodney had a good mind to do, for a strange thing happened. Suddenly Jeff Lowe was free. Suddenly he was four feet away, rigid on spread legs, and talking in a low, clear tone that cut the air like ax-strokes.

"You blasted bully," he was saying evenly, a little wearily, "you make me tired. You know darn well the *Wizard's* faster. But I'll take you up on that race. I will, see? And whichever schooner passes Burnt Island first—"

"Man!" howled Rod. "I said whichever man!"

Jeff clucked with exasperation.

"Same thing, ain't it?"

"Same thing! Yes, but I want it clear that this is you against me, your men against my men. You're all time blatting about how the *Wizard's* faster, how it's the boats that count. It ain't, and you know it. There's not one particle of difference between them two vessels, and you know it. It's the men that sail 'em, and I'm going to prove it."

"Have it your own way," Jeff agreed coldly. "The first *man*, of you and me, to pass Burnt Island wins."

An instant murmur of approval was cut short.

"Listen!" said Rodney.

Out of the black woods a growl of distant motors was rising to a humming roar. Three black bugs swept down the clamshell road and with a screaming of brakes circled madly, skidded to a stop.

In short, Sam had phoned. Here were the cars.

A rush, a scramble, laughter, horseplay. Gears clashed, engines droned. In three breaths every man in the crowd, *Witch* and *Wizard* happily intermingled, was up and aboard. In three more the pale road was vacant, the head of Sim Fell's wharf clear.

But not every man in both crews had gone. And thereby hangs this tale.

UNDER cover of the excitement a wiry dark figure had detached itself from the crowd and shuffled furtively off, down the wharf. Louis Nap, Canuck cook of Rodney's *Wizard*, had been listening attentively, listening proudly to the brave words of his idol, M'sieu Rodnee, in whom he had unbounded faith; listening contemptuously to the weak voice of that other, his skipper's puny rival. Louis Nap had a score to settle. He had been laughed at, that morning a fortnight ago, when coming up on deck all stupid with sleep he'd found himself aboard a strange vessel, among jeering strangers, and incredibly at sea. He had sworn then that those *Witch* pig-dogs would pay for this. He now saw a way. Louis Nap had a big idea.

"By gar, we show zem," he whispered exultantly, stumbling over some obstruction as he approached the wharf end, the flares and moving men. "Louis Napoleon—" he dealt himself three smart raps on the chest—"you an' me, we show zem. We mak' zem laff out ozzer side ze mouth, *hein?* Ze boat' mak' diff'rence you say. Mistaire Pig-Dog Jeff, *hein?* Ze *Wizar'* she faster, *hein? Bon!* We let you try her. Ah-ha! We see!"

Ahead, their decks and spars glimmering under Sim Fell's torches, the *Wizard* lay moored on his left, the *Witch* on his right. Sim's men were still busy with the *Wizard*, but on the other boat apparently their job was done. A solid row of kegs lined the *Witch's* bulwarks; above her empty deck the flares guttered and one by one died. Louis Nap stopped, drew himself up. Uttering a last courageous "By gar!" he stormed aboard Jeff's defenseless vessel.

He went first to her forecastle. Standing under the swing-lamp in its centre, he

drew from his pocket the battered notebook in which it was his habit to jot down lists of needed supplies when ashore. From behind his ear came the inevitable stub of pencil. And frowning heavily, his pale face working, lifting his eyes to let them rove slowly round the place, then dropping them quickly to the book clutched in his fist, Louis Nap began to write.

He made a strange figure standing there in his shabby carpet slippers, his faded dungarees and jersey—a stiff little stick of a man, his wispy mustache ends twitching like a cat's, and beads of sweat standing out on his shaved round head; a strange figure. But the words his fingers made, the words his pinched lips mumbled, were stranger still. At the top of a page he had spelled out "WICH". Then:

"Newspaper she lay on aftermos' lower bunk starboar'. Hm-m. No blanket in t'ird an' fif' bunk port . . . For' bunk port she mak' up so neat like hospital. Ozzers scramble' anyhow . . . H-m. T'ree pipe on table. Oilskin coat, two hat, one britch', she hang to stanchion. By gar, Napoleon, you an' me, *hein?* One more hat she fly on floor . . ."

When he had covered three notebook pages with fierce black scratches, Louis Nap repaired to the galley. This was easy—familiar ground. The condition of the fire in the range, a half filled coffee pot simmering at the back, the cake locker, the icebox—these were details that Louis Nap observed carefully and noted. A last swift look at the row of pots and pans and kettles, the sink, the tumbled bunk in the corner, and he was through.

On his way aft he took in the holds, getting a lantern and crawling down through sooty darkness. Not much here to detain him. A broom, a tub of salt in the corner, a heap of litter; silvery scales plastered over the timbers, a powerful stench of fish. All trawlers' holds are alike, anyhow. With wrinkling nose he swarmed up again, replaced the lantern and hurried aft to the cabin companion.

This was harder. Foremast hands get along any old way, on mates' clothes and blankets and pipes if their own aren't handy; but skippers like things just so. A chart was unrolled on the cabin table; on it lay parallels, dividers, three sheets of paper, the log book open, a pen, three pencils and a bitten apple. This table alone took up a whole page of Louis Nap's notebook. Then there were a shelf of books, a lead-line coiled by the door, and some clothes on the lockers. The skipper's stateroom adjoining took more time, more pages. It was an hour before Louis Nap's round pate and wispy mustache appeared on deck again. But he panted enthusiastically, bubbled "By gars!" to the foggy sky.

THE WHARF was still and dark; Sim Fell's men were moving slowly away. Then Louis Nap had his second big idea of the evening. Shrilly he hailed those retreating figures.

"Hola! M'sieu' Fell!"

The men stopped.

"Huh?" came a tired growl.

"Zey want you should move zese schooner', please you, M'sieu' Fell." Louis Nap was lying swiftly, with all the earnest conviction of his Gallic nature. "Zey leave ver' early, want ev'ryt'ing prepare'. Please you, M'sieu' Fell, you warp schooner' 'longside end of wharf, bot' togezzer, bows head' out."

A doubtful pause, while Louis Nap held his breath.

"Funny they didn't say nothin' to me," the voice on the wharf grumbled. Then, "All right." Louis Nap beat his breast. "Which one they want outside?"

Louis Nap hesitated only a moment. "Ze *Witch*, you please," he caroled. "M'sieu' Lowe's schooner outside." Then he skipped lightly ashore and was aboard the *Wizard* before Sim's men had picked up her lines. He slipped down into her forecastle.

His heart sang anthems. Thumpings on deck overhead, the measured grunts

of men heaving, the strain of cordage and the squeak of the *Wizard's* flank against barnacled piles told him the schooner was being moved to his bidding. But he acknowledged these pleasant sounds by hardly a twitch of an eyelid. There was much yet to be done. No telling how soon those pig-dogs and his own mates would return.

Scowling fiercely, he printed "WIZAR" in shaky capitals at the top of a fresh page, and so attacked this new job. By the time a grinding bump told him the *Witch* had been brought alongside, he had finished the forecastle, the holds, the cabin; and the notebook was filled up.

Then Louis Nap stripped off his jersey and really set to work. He worked steadily and almost in silence for two long hours. The notebook lay beside a lantern on the *Wizard's* wheelbox; to it he referred from time to time, pursing his lips, scowling, muttering; from it he would start off again with fresh zeal humming a snatch. Up the companion of one schooner he would stagger, half buried under a mountain of dunnage, and pause listening. No sound but the drip of fog off the rigging, the mournful faint hoot of a lighthouse siren down the coast . . .

Not back yet. Off he would go, across one deck, swinging laboriously over the joined bulwarks, across the other deck and below. Twenty trips he made, an ant hoarding crumbs, a rat in the woodpile. The sweat ran off his wiry body, his wispy mustache drooped. He panted and tugged, hissing encouragement. Blankets, oilskins, newspapers, books, leadline, charts, pipes, a bitten apple; keeping all straight, referring to the notebook, placing everything just so; standing back to cock his head and survey his work like an artist . . . On he labored, twenty trips and twenty more.

And at last, by gar, he was through. A tour of inspection satisfied him. He paused on deck; still no sound from ashore. He dowsed his lantern, felt his way to the galley of the outside schooner and wearily tucked himself into the bunk in the corner. Somewhere a ship's clock struck two bells. Louis Nap lay rigid, listening. The fog dripped; far off, the siren moaned.

"You an' me, Napoleon . . ."

But soon he dozed.

It must have been an hour later that he was roused by footsteps overhead, and sleepy gruff voices.

"What they want to move 'em for?"

"Which is which—that's what I want to know!"

"All right, boys, here we are!" This was M'sieu Rodnee, very near. "Here's my old pipe right on the table where I left her. Come on, now, forty winks and we're off. And the first man to pass Burnt Island Light . . ."

Then Louis Nap sighed with childlike satisfaction and fell soundly asleep, a serene smile on his earnest little face.

NEXT day at crack of dawn, Jeff's *Witch* and Rodney's *Wizard* put to sea. Not much of a day for racing: the fog still hung thick, the wind was southeasterly and light, and there seemed no sign of change. All the same, those two schooners made a pretty sight as they slipped their lines, dropped down the Narrows and, close-hauled, reached together for the open sea. Each of the schooners carried four lowers and a huge main topsail.

All day they slid on into dripping blankness, squarely abreast and not forty yards apart. Their dim gray shapes slanted gently against white void, ghosting over water that was oily and sullen and dark. The crew of each could just see the other. No word was spoken between them; but at minute intervals one foghorn called dully, and the other replied.

And the next day Jeff Lowe's troubles really began.

He stood at the wheel, his lined face blank, bitterly calling himself all the names he could think of. Not a look he gave that ghostly shape abeam. He knew Rodney too well. Rodney was cramping her; Rodney had her sheets

pinned too far in, killing her way; Rodney was playing with him as he'd played before. Jeff bit his lip. Trapped, that's what he was. How could he have been such a fool? The shame of it was bad enough; he'd be the laughing stock of the fleet.

But shame was the least part of this mess. He'd practically *given* Rod Greene what wasn't his to give anybody. The *Witch* was the bank's, really; his only on loan. Fool! Trapped like a woodchuck . . .

In the night the schooners separated. Jeff expected it, gave no sign. He heard Rod's horn growing fainter and fainter to windward—at last listened for it in vain. Rod had got tired of fooling. That's all.

The fog lifted before dawn, and the wind had backed to a point north of east and freshened. A mean day, greasy scud overhead, the sea black in racing squalls. A bitter cold day, the glass falling; it would be worse before it got better. Inwardly Jeff Lowe raged; outwardly he was his usual calm, composed, silent self.

When he found it advisable, he got the topsail off her; with it she had been sailing her rail under, and bet or no bet, he didn't intend to pull her sticks out. He got some doubtful glances as the order was obeyed, but he looked the other way.

They were over La Have now. The hands were baiting up with difficulty on decks that bucked and quivered. In her bows a man was sounding at intervals, calling the shoaling depths. At ten o'clock Jeff found the spot he wanted, hove her to, and got the boats over. He looked around him.

A mile to the eastward lay Rodney Greene. He'd been there some time, for his dories were already strung out in position along the horizon, their trawls down, getting fish. Jeff turned his back on the sight, waved stiffly to his own men as they pulled eagerly away. At this remarkable demonstration the boats sent back a piping cheer.

THE CATCH of that first set was moderate—nothing to write home about, but fifty quintals, a fair beginning. They had it aboard, split, salted and stowed by two o'clock and were away at once, leaving the cook and the skipper to clean up. A silly hope began to rise in Jeff's heart as he swabbed and scrubbed. Out of the tail of his eye he had seen Rodney's boats come in with their haul, then spread out again. His own men had been quicker. The race was even, now. If he could only get a lead, fishing here, and start home an hour or two before Rod did, perhaps . . .

But the hope died by sundown. Jeff's boats pulled in practically empty. The fish had moved, or else their anchors had drifted in what was by now a wicked breeze. No use trying to change ground in the darkness; they'd just have to sit tight and wait for morning. And then by the time they'd taken up a new position, Rod would be a whole set ahead of them. Trapped. What a fool he'd been!

Well, just for that he wouldn't change ground! What was the use of catching fish that the *Wizard's* men would profit by? No sir, he'd stay right here. Go through his four sets as agreed, and be off. The men would rather risk their lays of the catch, win or lose, than see him part with the schooner. For in the latter case they'd lose their jobs, too. He put it to them and, nodding sagely, they agreed. Over their shoulders, though, some threw anxious glances eastward, where a blur of lights dipping and rising showed that Rodney's crowd were still splitting their second set. It must have been a big one.

There was little sleep for anybody that night.

Daylight crept into the east, red as a wound. The long crested seas ran high. All night the wind had screamed in the rigging like a man tortured; it whipped up icy spray that froze as it landed on the schooner's decks. Number Eight dory smashed to splinters as the men labored to launch her; the rest got over somehow, and staggered away.

And then they struck dogfish.

Through his glasses Jeff had seen the ugly gray, snakelike bodies being slatted off the nearest dory's gunwale, and his heart sank. Dogs run in immense schools; they are vicious brutes, armed with spines that cut like razors; they swallow the hooks and often have to be cut clear. In short, they take time. It was noon before the boats were back, and then there were new hooks to be bent on, parted snoods to be replaced, a stabbed hand to be dressed.

Jeff was everywhere, a strange, pathetic figure in shabby oilskins and huge red seaboots, his face rigid as if cut in stone.

"Try more to the west'ard," he shouted after them as they got away for the last time. "That may clear 'em—the devils school down-wind sometimes. I'll run by and pick you up. Then we'll—" he paused, drawing a breath as if to come out with some big pronouncement; but all he said was—"then we'll—go home."

Again, stiffly, he waved. And again, through set teeth as they fought to keep those dories topside up, their dogged cheer came back.

Whereupon, with that last set, they found big fish. As if the gods laughed, they found the biggest single haul of the season. From the schooner Jeff saw the silvery haddock, the long brown cod come flapping aboard in endless file, bent backs, taut roding, every hook burdened; and at the sight he cried out in despair. Leaving the cook at the wheel, he ran up the ratlines to the crow's-nest at her swaying, plunging foretop, intent on knowing the instant the last snood was hauled in.

He crouched there, haggard, biting his lip, the glasses fixed to his eyes, waiting, waiting, holding himself in. He'd been through tight places, had Jeff Lowe. But this sitting still, doing nothing, feeling your vessel slipping from you with the slipping minutes! In a fever of impatience he looked off to the eastward.

And there he saw Rodney Greene, his own dories nested snugly, underway and streaking for home.

HALF AN HOUR later the crew of Jeff's Number Ten dory, farthest in the line, snapped off the last fish and looked up, and opened their eyes wide. A fury was descending upon them. Was that a schooner, Cap'n Lowe at her wheel? Half a gale blowing, weather for double-reefed jib and a scrap of trysail, and this monster that roared down in a smother of foam carried jib, staysail, fore and mainsail with not a reef-point anywhere! At her helm a small drenched man, his eyes ablaze, struggled and danced and shouted hoarsely, pointing at the horizon, as she rolled up into the wind and lay pounding. It was the *Witch* all right; it was Jeff Lowe. But the man had gone crazy.

Nearly swamped with fish and sea water, they blundered and hoisted aboard. There was no thought of dressing that haul. Simply, they dumped fish, tubs, trawls and boat gear below, battened the hatches, nested and lashed the dories—and flew away. Panting then, they sought shelter under the windward rail. But a voice from aft belabored them. They listened, stared.

A topsail! But you couldn't set a topsail in this. The thing would go to ribbons, men and hamper with it. Look at those seas, man! Hear that wind! *Feel it claw!* Jeff's eyes glittered. Would they get that canvas or wouldn't they? They got it. Somehow they set it. By the grace of God it held.

The wind was on her quarter. She yawed wildly, sagged off and brought up with shattering jerks. She shot dizzily up over the crest of a comber in a hiss of seething water, dropped into the trough with a sound like thunder, to bury her nose in the next. Her spars groaned, her rigging sang and creaked and snapped. She shuddered as if in despair, bowed with the weight of solid water coursing over her; but still, under the mighty buffets dealt her, gallantly she flew. Over her plunging bow on the westward horizon

now and then a faint dark scrap was visible. At times that scrap seemed to grow slightly larger.

But the dusk shut it from view. Nobody thought of going below. The cook's fire was out, but nobody thought of eating. At eight bells two men groped aft clinging to anything handy; they offered to take the wheel. Out of red rimmed, sunken eyes Jeff Lowe stared back at them dumbly, as if he couldn't understand. They heard him mumbling something about a *balloon jib* . . . Sure, there was a good big ballooner, up for'rd somewheres . . . Have to get it out, come daylight. The two men groped back, shaking their heads.

The schooner tore onward into shrieking black night.

AS THE hours dragged by, a strange feeling came to Jeff. He tried to shake it off, kept telling himself it was only because he had been so cautious—he'd never tested her before. But the feeling returned. It danced before his eyes as they peered into blackness; it tingled in his aching arms, his numb and aching legs. Something was different, here. Was it in him? It felt just as if—as if he had a new vessel under him.

Good old *Witch*, she was certainly taking punishment; she was certainly fighting hard. What a boat, to live under a load of canvas in this hell! What men, sticking by him like this! Salt spray whipped his face; he dashed an arm across his eyes. He clung on . . . sailed her, sailed her . . . Good old girl! By the Lord, she deserved a better skipper.

And at long last the sky behind him paled, the black world turned a bleak and sickly gray. Morning, and the wind spent a little. Jeff's burning eyes searched the horizon. It was empty. That scrap of sail had gone.

Well, now for that ballooner. His mouth had opened on the order when down from the crow's-nest came the lookout's frightened hail.

Rocks? The man was loony. Dead whale, more likely . . .

Swiftly they bore down upon the thing. It was the hull of a schooner rolled on her beam ends, her stern awash and settling fast. Her foremast was gone; her big mainsail lay on the water like a broken brown wing. Every wave creamed over her. And along her round green flank a line of men clung like flies, waving piteously.

Everybody knew what that derelict was.

Jeff put his helm down and came whirling into the wind to leeward. His face was a study. He said no word; he didn't even smile, though deep within him something had begun to sing. He waved stiffly, encouragingly, to Rodney Greene.

An hour later the castaways were aboard. Jeff put his helm up, and they were off again. The crews mingled equably enough, joking about their wagers which now couldn't be paid, swapping experiences of that ghastly night, stamping round to get warm. Cheery smoke was bellying out of the galley stovepipe. The wind had dropped to mere two reef strength; in the west the sky was clearing. Behind them, a long sea toppled on that stricken hulk, which shivered once and sagged lower, and was gone.

Rodney sauntered aft to chat with his savior. He was cheerful, full of alibis. It seems he'd found a balloon jib up for'rd somewhere that he didn't know he owned! Temptation was too great. Foremast had snapped like a match—must have been rotten anyhow. Oh, he was sorry to lose her. Good boat, that *Wizard*—all that. But he had her well covered. Jeff would get his money, never fear. Man of his word, Rod Greene.

Jeff hardly listened. His eye had been caught by one of Rod's crew who stood apart, out of the fun. Rod's cook, he thought—a Canuck called Pap or Nap or something. The man looked sick. He cowered down by the cabin trunk, he was shaking all over. His face was the color of putty. His eyes rolled like a negro's as they stared at Rodney Greene.

"Of course," Rod's voice was rolling smoothly on, "I am sorry to lose that

catch. Man, what a haul! Five hundred quintals in four sets. Wha's that?"

The thin white pencil of Burnt Island Light hove in view, neared slowly, then loomed big against its dark background of fir. Beyond it lay the harbor mouth. They were nearly home.

Rod Greene glanced up. He looked astern at the cloud of seagulls wheeling and whickering, following the schooner in. He looked ahead and saw the light; and he stopped talking.

"Guess I'll go see how the boys are," he mumbled, and stalked away.

Jeff's eyes narrowed slightly. He watched the big figure move slowly forward, stopping now and then for a word, but always getting on. The lighthouse was less than half a cable's length away when Rodney reached the bow. He stood there idly, one hand on her forestay, gazing out across the water, very still. The light was near.

Jeff gave a short harsh laugh.

"First *man* to pass—so that's it, eh? Rod Greene," he called, "come back here! You don't get my *Witch* that way."

The man turned his head. His face was flushed, the eyes furtive; but he didn't move. Every one was watching. The lighthouse was right off her bows.

"Come back here," Jeff's low calm voice repeated, "or I'll have you carried. You can't have my *Witch* today."

Rodney came. There was a dory towing astern, the very boat that had brought him and his men off the wreck. Jeff jerked a thumb.

"Get into it."

They passed Burnt Island Light in that order, Jeff Lowe still at his wheel, Rod hunched up dejectedly on a thwart of the dory. They passed the light in silence.

But a moment later this silence was broken by a very loud cry. Startled, Jeff turned his head.

Rod was still in the dory, but he looked as if he might roll out any minute. He gripped a gunwale on each side to steady him. His face was a mottled gray. His mouth gaped. His eyes, fixed balefully on a point ahead and a little above him, seemed ready to pop out of his head. After that first agonized howl he couldn't seem to get words out. But at last—

"*Look—over—your—taffrail,*" he whispered.

"Take this wheel a minute, Ed," Jeff called. He stepped round the wheelbox, bent, craned his neck, looked over the taffrail as bidden. What he saw made him start, then stare stupidly; and then he broke into a slow wide smile.

It's an odd fact that nameplates are read almost exclusively by strangers. Whoever wants to read his own? Besides, the thing is upside down, viewed from deck. Yet nameplates can be read upside down quite easily: Their legends are so simple, their big gold letters so amply spaced. This one read "*Wizard.*"

Jeff straightened up.

"Magic," he observed. Then, fumbling in an inside pocket, he drew out a small object and gazed at it quizzically. "Magic," Jeff repeated. "But darned if it don't sort of fit in with this other piece of—witchery. Darned if it don't explain this little thing that I found on the wheelbox, morning we left Fell's Landing. Good old magic!"

The thing in his hands was a battered brown notebook, its cover warped and soggy, its pages filled up with fierce black scratches. He looked up from it. His mild gray eyes took in again that wretched Canuck still shivering by the cabin trunk; turned from him to the glaring figure in the dory. Understandingly he grinned.

Rodney Greene was roaring:

"If I ever find out who done this thing! *If I ever find out—*"

Jeff looked straight into the terrified eyes of Louis Nap, and winked.

"Don't worry, Rod," he said softly, "you never will."

Then whipping his arm back, with a fine free gesture such as he had never in his life used before, he let the notebook fly. It sailed in a high arc, pages fluttering, then dropped lightly on to the sea. A gull swooped with raucous cries, snatched up the brown morsel and sped away with it in triumph.

Adventure's Abyssinian Expedition

Diminishing hippos, invisible kudos and a lost caravan

By GORDON MacCREAGH

THE SECOND wandering into the wilderness. Alone and unafraid. When a dauntless explorer person says "alone" in Africa he means unaccompanied by any other white man. He may have a hundred porters and a twenty team ox wagon and a half a dozen quarter-breed drivers and conductors and a dozen armed askaris. But if he has no white companion he is "alone in the trackless wastes".

This splendidly equipped caravan, alas, was not our own. It comes out of my library of African travel. But caravans very nearly as magnificent do go out, even from Abyssinia. There came a titled Englishman who was an ex-governor of a British Colony, and he brought with him an Indian rajah whose income reminded one of those statistics about the distance in light years of the farther stellar systems, and the rajah brought a retinue such as is befitting to his kind.

They were preparing to trek eastward through Ogaden, a district with an evil reputation, into British Somaliland and out via Berbera. The British minister to the court of Ethiopia bestirred himself to

obtain special permits from the prince regent and special passports from the minister of the interior; and secretaries of the legation bustled to engage nagadis and to bind them with unbreakable contracts; and nagadis scurried to buy up extra mules for the invasion—I hesitate to say how many mules. I don't know, as a matter of fact. But I do know that the price of mules and mule feed soared so that I couldn't think of buying any.

A tremor of excitement shook the capital for a couple of weeks. On the Somaliland side the borderland officials must have had high temperatures. For an army of Abyssinian nagadis and camp followers could never be permitted to trek through to Berbera. So hard working British officials on that side had to organize a relay caravan of fifty camels, with their own attendant army of smelly Somalis to wait on the border and take over the extravagant expedition.

The titled Englishman is quoted as saying that it costs any man two thousand pounds to shoot a lion and an elephant; and his preparations were on a corresponding scale. He talked of organizing a herd of a hundred Somali horsemen to ride down lions and things for the expedition of his rajah.

I heard about all this splendor and I wept. That was the proper, the only, way to go forth into the trackless wastes and slay large and ferocious beasts.

We made up our own expedition of two entirely hairless and very evil tempered camels and a sulky Arab boy to beat them with a long bamboo and three camp boys and a crafty old Amhara hunter by the name of Atto Desta, who had won our hearts during our last trip.

No nagadis this time—we remained true to our oath never to deal with nagadis again except as enemies. No comforting and reliable hunter Jim. We knew everything about African travel now, we felt. We and Atto Desta.

Old Atto Desta was a man who bore his scars of experience. He had an impossible circular weal where his neck must have been cut all the way through in a war against the Shankallas. Two fingers of his left hand had been hewn from him in a private fight with shield and spear. Three fingers of his right hand had been blown off in an explosion of a gaspipe trade gun such as nobody but an African would dare to use. And he limped just a little on his right leg which had been clawed from thigh to ankle by a leopard one time when the gun didn't go off. There were other smaller scratches too.

With our own great store of knowledge, therefore, and with the little that Desta might have picked up, we figured that we might get through.

One day by train and another day by camel—so the secret that was imparted to us ran—was a hidden lake at the foot of an old volcano where the hippopotami lay over each other in heaps like seals and where there were no crocodiles and where kudu browsed on the hills like cattle and smaller game infested the lower slopes.

This paradise lost was to be our first objective.

THE DIRECTIONS worked out with the perfection of all good ground floor tips. A train did run for about a day, and from the appointed jumping off place the tip of an old volcano was visible. But the lake at the foot of it could by no stretch of ten leagued boots be reduced to one day's travel with pack camels; and it turned out to be three lakes; and the crocodiles in them ranged up to twelve lean and hungry feet basking in rows on the sand spits.

Also, the directions had forgotten to say that the foot of the volcano with its lake was a good five miles on the further side of that pestiferous Hawash River which, next to the Blue Nile, is the biggest in Abyssinia and divides the country in half, flowing from east to west for some four hundred miles before it suddenly turns northward to cut the railroad tracks and disappear in the sands of the Somali desert.

I used to think that Kipling had said all the evil things that could be said about

camels. But trying to drive an Arab boy to drive camels over an impossible day's march and through a river that was yet conceited with the little rains, I thought up and said a lot that Kipling hadn't touched.

It was another of those joyous first day treks after a period of softening up out of the saddle. From 8 A.M. until it was too dark to see accurately enough to hit the camel boy so he would hit his camels. It seems that only a hereditary camel driver knows how to hit a camel so that it will speed up rather than give vent to a bubbly howl and kick out with two feet at once at utterly unguessable angles.

I suppose we have all done it and we shall all just as surely do it again. Exasperate ourselves into a frenzy, pushing on with the conviction that the desired objective can not be more than half a mile ahead. And pushing on, and on, and finally making camp in the floundering dark and in an arid desert of many miles in extent. Till morning shows water two hundred yards away which the brute camels either could not, or did not want to find.

The only ray of sunshine during that day was that I got a greater bustard bebefore the dark enveloped us; and greater bustard is about forty pounds of the best bird meat in Africa.

That bird as a matter of fact, was very nearly the only bright spot of the entire lake region. The hippos that lay on top of each other like seals turned out to number exactly six. One male, an enormous brute who, when he yawned, showed a mouthful of tusks like the mammoth room of the Natural History Museum and who left a track like an elephant; three females and two calves. We got to know them personally by name before we came away.

Beelzebub was the big bull, because he was as cunning as the devil. Elizabeth, Betsy and Bess were the ladies because their ears, when they showed them above water were all exactly alike and the names, therefore, when we called them, caused no confusion in their minds. Charles and Dave were the younger set.

We first met them when we had just decided that it was all a lie about there being any hippos—unless, perhaps, they might be in a hidden creek on the further side of the biggest lake, which was the only place we could not thoroughly explore with the field-glasses.

Since it was a long, long way through heavy bush to stalk around, we decided to row across in our "air raft". That is to say, *I* decided. The other three fourths of the expedition was not so keen on doing it that way. She felt that a crocodile could so easily bite a hole in the air raft, which was no more than a great inflatable rubber tire with a bottom sewn in. But I reminded her that, pooh pooh, she needn't be so nervous because that man who had given us this splendid tip about the lake had told us there were no crocodiles.

So we set forth and Desta waved us a gloomy farewell with three twisted fingers. And of course no crocodile bit a hole in our tire. But that further shore where the creek wound into its recess was at the foot of the volcano, and an ancient lava had broken it up into the most picturesque peaks and pinnacles upon which cormorants and spoonbills and brown geese posed and preened themselves.

I was enjoying these with an artist's delight—my lady not so much, because she still harbored that foolish thought about crocodiles—when our tire scraped horribly on to a shoal pinnacle. My lady squealed; I swore with instant presence of mind and managed to joggle our craft free.

And then I suddenly bent to it and rowed. Water was coming in. I rowed well on to another pinnacle, though we got frantically off that one without another hole. A rubber tire is not easy rowing; but I set my teeth and stuck manfully to it; and our next bump was soft, shelving black mud a hundred feet from the shore.

We leaped out and sloshed through the sinking ooze to dry and safe land. And then the critical portion of the expedition remarked that the hole was not so very

big and that not so much water had come in as she had thought way out there and that there hadn't really been any need for such a hurry and particularly not for so much swearful flurry. And the rest of the expedition took it meekly—as always—and set to wiping the water out of the rifle bolts.

It was not till afterward that I told her that, just as we shoved off that first pinnacle, I had seen, just beyond her back, a great weed grown chunk, a hundred feet long at least, of dead, scaly lava formation wake up and scuttle into the water, throwing a bow wave a lot bigger than did our boat. Then she had a qualm. I had already had mine when we stuck on that second pinnacle.

But for all that, I don't believe that a crocodile would bite a hole in a rubber boat.

IT WAS a lot later in the torrid day that we got to make the acquaintance of our hippos.

We crawled through the bush in the direction that the creek should be and emerged presently into a maze of winding hippo paths. Wide swathes, well trampled and easy going—until our backs broke from stooping; for a hippo doesn't build his tunnels more than four feet high. And what a labyrinth!

I have no shame in saying that we lost our way in the aimless wanderings of those beasts. We knew, we thought, where the creek lay, and we ducked along a tunnel that went that way and then wound another way and then crossed two other tunnels that looked as though they might go our way but later on changed their minds.

Occasional glades of grass stamped flat showed us tree tops that we thought we remembered and set us off down new tunnels, which went direct, we were sure, to the water; and then crossed a tunnel we knew for certain because of our boot tracks. We felt distinctly glad to find boot tracks by means of which we would at least be able to get out of that skyless mess of back breaking steampipes. What steamily moist dens those tunnels were!

Overstudy of highbrow literature in the foolish days of my extreme youth has left me so shortsighted that I need glasses to see a clean bead on a rifle front sight. It is the most infernal nuisance to which a hunter can be subjected; for I, at all events, have never been able to investigate the distant something that might be game through the field-glasses without first removing the spectacles and dropping them in the dirt; nor have I been able to devise any form of sweat band that will prevent sudden cataracts of perspiration from blurring up both lenses of the spectacles with a single hot cascade.

It was the sweat band that I needed most in those hippo tunnels. But, like the roads to Rome, all hippo tunnels lead to water. A crooked passage suddenly opened out to the secluded creek; or rather, a wide arm of the lake, it was.

And there floated our hippo. Well out in the water, of course; while we were on good dry land where crocodiles don't have all the odds.

I don't propose to dilate once again upon the difficulty of hunting these Abyssinian lake hippo. It is sufficient to say that every night of two whole weeks was devoted, first to a futile hope of just strolling out before the darkness fell and bagging a big bull as he browsed along one of his tunnels; then to a systematic mapping out of routes and feeding places; and last to wondering just what influences make a hippo decide upon which particular restaurant it is going to patronize that night.

That creek wound a long way inland, and then a long way farther in soggy swamp; and on the further side of it—two miles by the shortest hippo boulevard—was another labyrinth of feeding grounds. When we would wait in the falling dusk with all the caution of mice on one side, and my wife would be getting ready to climb all the way up to the top of a euphorbia shrub, because the big beasts surely looked as if they were making up their minds to come out right in front of

us, an accursed breath of vagrant wind would drift over us waterwards, and immediately the whole family would sniff and snort to one another and sheer off.

And there they would remain, lifting just their microphone ears and periscope eyes, and submerging again with all the stealthy cunning of submarines, leading us to hope that they would forget their suspicion. Until it would be too dark to follow them. And then they would quietly dive, and ten minutes later we would hear the vast splashings of them as they heaved their bulks out on the other side of the creek, where black night would be upon us before we could ever get round to them.

Fot it was our fate that this was a period between moons.

These were the beasts that we had been told lay out on the shoal sands like seals. This the place where we had expected to spend a week, get our game, and then go on to the far end of the Hawash River to the borders of that Ogaden district so that the great expedition of the rajah wouldn't get all the lions and things.

WE MARVELED that so much and such persistent misinformation was dealt out to apparently everybody about the interior of the country by nearly everybody else. I know now, of course, that few people know anything about the interior at first hand; and that everybody feels qualified to pass on second hand information, with the seriousness of gospel, to the new comer who has not yet learned enough about the ropes to take the information at a ninety per cent. evaluation.

I am impelled in this respect to make the comment that many people who undoubtedly do know facts lack entirely the faculty of conveying them with any degree of clarity. I have met old-timers, men who have traveled the country since the days of Menelik, who have been and seen with their own eyes, and who have given me descriptions of routes and conditions which have proved to be so hazy, so actually inaccurate that, had I not had proof, I would have doubted that the informant had ever been out of the city

In the case of my informant about this volcano with its overstocked lake and its slopes swarming with game, it is easy to believe that nearly all the hippopotami had died of some frightful epidemic since he was there and that the remaining six had become obsessed by a demon of suspicion. It is even credible that my personal imp of ill luck had chased all the kudu away from the mountain slopes.

Accompanied by wise old Desta, I used to make futile trips up the sides of that wretched volcano, enacting the epic of excelsior. Around its foot were sparse villages of Gallas, hospitable souls who brought smoked milk in gourds which, for my part, quite aside from its sepulchral taste, I was always afraid to drink because at least half of these people seemed to be suffering from *chorassu*, which is the local name for *yickuk*, that vicious first cousin of the scabies bug.

They told us, oh yes, there were plenty of kudu, on the slopes; but higher up. An hour or so higher up there were decrepit huts of lean upland Gallas, two thirds of whom had the *yickuk*, and who told us that kudu were plentiful—but higher up. Another two hours higher were the wind shelters of the goatherd boys, all of whom had the *yickuk*, and who said that the kudu were still higher.

The reason that the herd boys were no higher themselves was because the slopes began to be too steep even for goats and because nothing grew that they could eat. Still, having come so far, I toiled to the top—only once, the first time—and looked into a dead crater and round at the view, and realized that the sun was so low that short cuts and high speed would be necessary in order to make camp in time to go forth on the nightly hippo hope.

It is not exaggeration that during a stay of nearly three weeks at that place I never once saw a kudu. I am prepared, too, to swallow the miracle that some malicious power had changed all the lesser game that I had been promised into the huge tortoises over which we kept stumbling in

the undergrowth and which we distinguished from rocks only by their loud serpent hissing under foot.

CLOSE upon three weeks accordingly were wasted, while the "big rain" period drew inexorably nearer, before we adapted a Kitchener craft to our hippos, and built roads to circumvent them. Strait through the bush, with machete and ax, we hewed a path connecting hippo tunnels by the shortest route all round the edges of the creek; so that when the cunning beasts thought they had left us lamenting on one side and climbed out on the farther shore for their dinner we could quickly run around and surprise them.

It was not until that had been done, not until we had spent a couple of days tramping about and shooting off guns and showing ourselves in full view along the creek bank on one side, so as to get the beasts thoroughly disgusted with that shore, that we were able to work our trick; to run round before the final dark and to get a fair chance of a shot while it was yet light enough to discern the front sight, and particularly to distinguish the none too large space between the big bull's eye and his ear as he floated off shore waiting for it to grow still darker.

I shall not attempt to describe the gruesome process of waiting till a hippo's carcass floats and then getting the beast out of the water and cutting it up. Suffice it that many Galla tribesmen are needed for the purpose. Gallas, because a dead hippo floats after twenty-four hours, or possibly more, and it seems to begin to be uncomfortably odorous after half that time.

Camp boys, even though of Galla stock themselves, pretend to a far too sensitive state of civilization to touch such a beast. The salvage party must consist of wild Gallas from the neighboring villages. It has been given to some of us to pass to leeward of a sea poodle, as our own river police call a salvaged dog. Well, multiplying ordinary dog by a couple of tons of hippopotamus, I can find no heart to reprove camp boys for their sensitiveness.

Wild Gallas prepare themselves for their immersion by smearing themselves copiously with the oldest butter in their villages; and the two score of them, then, who are necessary for the salvage operations, constitute in themselves quite a powerful anodyne against submerged hippo.

I have seen in museums and in one or two expensive clubs complete heads of hippo mounted, and much I have wondered how the strong minded slayers of the beasts have ever managed to peel and preserve the skin, assuming even that they conducted costly expeditions provided with gas masks and derricks and all the other bulky paraphernalia necessary to skinning pachyderms.

The skin of a hippo head alone weighs, green, about two hundred pounds. Just to field cure the mass, owing to its enormous fat content, requires: first, a protracted period of warm, dry weather, then, unthinkable quantities of salt. The skins must be packed with salt for twelve hours, cleaned out, thoroughly scraped and repacked with salt. Six or eight times. The process is really one of slow dehydration, and it can not be hastened by the sun, otherwise the skin will be ruined by fat burn. A ten per cent. solution of formaldehyde helps, too, with the ears and eyelids.

I don't know exactly how much salt would be necessary to dry out a hippo mask, because I didn't have that much. But I estimate at least fifty pounds, nearly half a mule load. Salt, in the outlying portions of Abyssinia, is money, and is as difficult to get as is money anywhere. Nagadis carry it in bars and trade it at the rate of about twenty-five cents a pound—when they have any. A pack mule today costs thirty dollars, and a mule boy gets paid five dollars. Let mathematicians figure out the cost of fifty pounds of salt, plus the half mule to carry it, plus service, plus backsheesh to any army of wild Galla taxidermists.

However, there are no nagadi caravans traveling to hidden lakes where there is no

trade; and Gallas don't know the use of salt for any purpose; and I have no hippopotamus mask all sweet and ready for mounting on a specially strengthened wall in the office of *Adventure* to hang it on to.

But there will arrive some day by ocean freight about a hundred pounds of bone. A skull, picked clean and white by industrious driver ants, with a mouthful of ivory teeth like the piles of an old pier; and if there's a bigger one anywhere in America I'd like to hear about it.

And I hope that ye Eds of *Adventure* will think they want it when they have to pay the freight bill.

I HAVE dwelt much in the foregoing upon difficulties to be met with in shooting on dark nights and on the ways and means to be devised for the avoidance of that necessity. And I find myself asking the same question that others must be asking of themselves.

Why does there not exist a good and efficient night sight for a modern rifle? Or, if such a boon does exist, why is it not internationally advertised, or at least to be found in our large sporting goods stores?

There are gadgets of various sorts, I know. Polished bulbs and aluminum beads and patent clip holders for triangular bits of white paper, and so on. But all of them rely upon making the most of such faint sky reflections as there may be. Let their inventors try to use them on a pitch black African night when the sky is blanketed thick with the clouds getting ready for their big monsoon burst.

And let not any helpful savant tell me about luminous paint. I have two bottles of it—splendid stuff for illuminating the numbers on a house door, but a pin point lost in the darkness on the bead of a front sight.

Why, I wonder, has no inventor of gun gadgets produced something on the principle of a radiolite watch? Some simple clip arrangement that could be snapped on, front and rear? The thing seems to be so simple that possibly there are optical difficulties in the way. Possibly the rear sight glow would cloud the front. But it would seem that a thin circle on the principle of a large peep would allow sufficiently clear view of a heavier front sight. If anything of the sort exists, why have I not been able to buy it at a New York gunsmith's?

Now let some observant reader ask what do I expect to see beyond so luminous a sight on a pitch black night when the existing patents are useless? My answer is that one can see moving game, shadows on the sky line, bulks against the sheen of a still water, eyes in the blackness under bushes, when one can't see one's own hand, let alone the front sight end of a rifle. It is more than once, too, that I have wished I could see to shoot at a stealthy sound.

If I demand too great a miracle in a sighting gadget let me be excused on the ground that lack of such a thing caused me to spend three priceless weeks of dry weather, at the end of which time heavy night showers began to remind me that the big monsoon was fast on its way; and, what was more unfortunate, began to remind the camp crew that the home trail was due.

I had forgotten to say that the camel boy went away long ago. By night, silently, and with both his smelly beasts. Had it not happened to me I would not have believed that camels could be gotten under way with so little noise. At all other times they have bubbled and howled and roared like tortured fiends from the moment that the hobbles were slipped from their knees. But on this occasion the flight was consummated without waking a soul in the camp. Morning came and the beasts were gone. That was all.

I can understand that line now about "they have folded their tents like the Arabs and as silently stolen away". Before that I was convinced that an Arab could do nothing without first making a noise about it.

The method of hobbling a camel, incidentally, is an interesting provision of nature for controlling an unruly beast.

The front knees of the brute have been specially designed loose jointed so that it can kick out without warning in any direction. But it can also, therefore, bend back so that the leg folds upon itself as completely as a jack knife. So all that the camel driver has to do is to beat his beast to kneel and then slip a circlet of rope over the doubled up limb. And there the ungainly beast must squat, manacled as safely as in irons, and howl the night through.

There is another way, too, which one sees in the camel market. This is to tie the nose rope to a ridiculous peg of eight or ten inches in length, push the peg into the ground, then beat the the camel as a warning and tell it that it is securely tied. And it is astonishing for how long the foolish beast will believe it.

But this method is not so good for a night fastening when the brute's gentle tentative tugs at its rope will not bring a whirlwind of yelling master and stick about its ears. Left to itself, it will eventually root out its feeble peg and will go on the prowl to feast on cactuses and tent pegs and green canvas duffle bags, until it flounders in among the tent ropes; and then the whole camp must wake up to hear about it.

The camel boy's flight was sufficient to start the slow current of ideas in our camp boy's heads. They began to be restive. The rain was coming, and all the ills of the monsoon would be upon them. The Hawash River, too, was rising; this time not to go down again till some time in October.

So good old Desta went a-journeying among the Galla villages and hired a bony horse here and a mule there and supplemented with sturdy little donkeys; and we loaded up a heterogeneous caravan and got across the river—just in time once more—and pitched camp on the farther shore in a beautiful grass flat under an enormous fig tree in full fruit.

AND THAT night it rained. The unbelievable rain of a monsoon burst, though not so disastrous to us as when we had camped under a fig tree once before and met the burst of the "little rains". There would be no excuse for a man who would twice pitch his camp in a depression through which the drainage of a country side found its way. This fig tree grew on a gentle knoll where the pools formed all around us but not in our tents. An ideal spot. Till the sun broke through with the morning, and troops, herds, infernos of white whiskered monkeys came to feast on the ripe fruit and all but drove us from the place.

We shouted; we threw stones; we fired shots. They only screeched and danced up and down on all fours and peered like aged imps between parted leaves and went on eating fruit. Nothing less than shooting one or two of them would have frightened them off; and that I shrank from doing. I was too pitiful and weak for my own comfort. So there the little pests stayed.

How romantic! How close to fascinating nature at its cunningest! So we thought, too, before we had been in camp beneath a thousand monkeys. One single monkey in a cage in a zoo where rations are measured can make a more insanitary mess of half chewed fruit peels and things than can a small boy of its own size. Consider, then, a thousand of them where food is limitless and only the best bite out of each piece need be taken.

The camp boys crept about with their blankets drawn over their heads and wondered why we stayed. One reason obvious to them was because the Galla owners of the nondescript pack animals would not let them travel a day beyond their ken and had immediately taken them back home before the river should rise and cut off all retreat for three months or more.

Another reason that appeased them for a while was that big fat catfish were running strong in the muddy river and we played a little with hooks and lines. But the real reason was that I was trying stealthily with Desta's help, to get together enough pack beasts of one sort or another to move on to another district a

few thousand feet lower down where the rain would not come for two weeks.

But the boys had the cunning intelligence, almost, of the monkeys above them. They were restive and suspicious. And, as the African always does when he is nervous, they became sullen. They scamped the little work there was. They had to be driven to rub down our riding animals. My own beast was a good wilful mule; but my lady's on this trip was a horse. No mule for her after her experience of having been thrown into a thorn bush on the very first day of her life that she had ever ridden.

The horse was tractable, but as delicately stupid about its food as horses always are. The boys, instead of watching that it did not get in among the poisonous new herbage that was coming up with the rain, let it roam. They squatted moodily apart by the river's edge and muttered to each other; mutterings that became silent when we approached.

There were all the regular marks of trouble in the wind. And trouble with the African boy can be quelled only by making him more afraid of the consequences than of the thing he is afraid of. To make an African boy thoroughly afraid of consequences means a regime of unbroken *schrecklichkeit;* and *schrecklichkeit* often leads to shooting. But they had not been bad boys, as African boys go. I didn't want to shoot one of them any more than I did one of the monkeys.

So the trouble came right along according to schedule.

Atto Desta came back from his scouting trip and announced that he had secured a fleet of donkeys to take us on our way. Immediately there arose a howl. What way? Where?

Whatever we said, was the answer; and it was none of their business, but the way would not be home for a while yet.

Then there was mutiny. The boy whom we had considered to be quite the best of the lot, to whom we had been planning to give a backsheesh for good work, rose up to state flatly that he wouldn't go. The rain season was upon us and that was sufficient reason to ban the interior for all but lunatics. The railroad and civilization were a single day's trek from camp, and to security of civilization he would go and nowhere else.

The rule, of course, with mutinies is to quell them instantly with a heavy hand.

Africa is full of people who will tell me that I ought to have jumped that insubordinate boy hand and foot and to have beaten him, first, for so much as harboring the thought of disobedience, and then to have continued beating him until he howled for mercy. Such a course would have established authority and would have been a salutory lesson to the others.

A good rule, and sound psychology as applied to the African boy; proven by many generations of white men all over the rest of Africa. Here, in Abyssinia—and particularly there, in that spot—I take no shame that I did not lift a finger against that insolent boy.

He knew too cunningly well what he was doing. And so did I.

Had I beaten him as he deserved, he would have howled, not for mercy, but for help. "Ooh-ooh-ooh," he would have squealed, for he was a Galla. Two hundred yards behind our camp was a Galla village. I had already seen Galla spearmen gather to that rallying call, and I was not prepared to start a Galla war for the sake of chastising an insolent boy.

All I did was to tell him that if he wouldn't take my orders he was not my servant and to order him to get out of the camp at once. He went meekly enough; though he had the effrontery to ask for his nearly a month's back pay. Of course I did not give it to him. I told him that he could wait at the railroad till I came back and then sue me before an Abyssinian judge. And if he didn't take the initiative, I would; and I would abide by the judge's decision.

There is a very wholesome law in Abyssinia which makes it a serious offense for a boy to leave his master while

on trek; for it is recognized how entirely dependent is a traveler in the wilderness upon his servitors, whether he be a white man or a nagadi.

In spite of that, another boy picked up his meager goods and said that he too would sacrifice his pay rather than his life, and would head for civilization rather than the bush; and he would take his chance of being put into chains later by a judge. Which shows how actually terrified those people are of the rainy season.

The only boy who stayed was the same faithful one who had stood by us so nobly upon our return from the previous trek when we left the caravan behind. Once again this youth must have had a telepathic insight into our minds. For he was so utterly useless in the field that we had once again decided to fire him when we got home. Once again, therefore, his faithfulness saved him his job. But he was wise enough, contemplating the prospect of triple work, to lie right down and groan with his frightful sickness that attacked him in the head and in the back and in the belly.

So there we were stuck with a campful of gear under our monkey tree and one sick boy and our hunter Desta. Deserted and helpless to move.

I HAVE often wondered how our own hardy prospectors can go out alone, or perhaps a pair of them, with ten or a dozen burro loads of mining gear and food for a six month's sojourn in the mountains. Here in Africa the standard proportion is one driver to every three animals. Boys will positively not hire out for less. And having helped to herd the animals, I can hardly see how they could.

Pack mules are bad enough, but donkeys are worse. Mules, at least, are supposed to follow a lead horse. Of course they don't, any more than they want to. They wander, and stop, and feed, and break back unless driven ceaselessly and all the time. It is all of one boy's job to attend to three of them. Donkeys have much the same characteristics, only much worse, and there must be many more of them for the same load.

Even old Desta shrank from the thought of attempting to continue our trek without boys. He came and said that he would come with us if we insisted. But now that the rain was coming, it was time to hurry up and plow his corn patch and to plant seed so that they might attain to the best of their growth during the wet months and be ready to ripen with the dry hot weather.

There was nothing to do but to admit defeat at the hands of the rain gods and to send Desta out to collect up sufficient beasts to carry our goods back to the railroad. Desta's own village lay not very far across the river; and thither he went, hoping that the news of our predicament had not spread.

But all the Galla peoples, it seemed, had known instantly that white folks were stuck and in need of help. All of a sudden every animal in the district was urgently needed for plowing. The permanent rain might come any day now, and a day lost would have frightful and far reaching results. Fields unplowed. Seed unsown. Loss of crops. Famine!

All to the effect that donkeys—which can't be used for plowing anyhow—would cost three times as much as they should. That is to say, fifty cents per animal for the day's trek to the railroad.

Well, what is the rich American for but to pay out money? Whether to a gang of Galla robbers who own a fleet of pack animals or to a European syndicate that owns a fleet of steamships? So we submitted; and it was immediately astonishing how many people were cheerfully ready to risk rain upon fields unplowed and the consequent famine.

Beasts came. Not at 6 A.M. as we had ordered, but at noon. The sick boy miraculously recovered. We loaded up, bade hurried farewell to Desta, and rode forth. *And within ten minutes the whole caravan was lost.*

We had ridden not two hundred yards ahead. We had looked back before taking

a turn in the trail and had seen the leading animals coming along. Ten minutes later, remembering our past experience, we thought we had better wait. Nothing came round the bend. We waited no longer. We rode right back. And empty wilderness, dripping with rain-drops and sun smiled joyously at us.

Gone was the caravan. Gone was our lone remaining boy with it. Gone was Atto Desta. Only the monkeys remained. Of course other trails led through the bush to our destination. But which one? Tracks? There were a thousand tracks of mules and horses and donkeys. Deep tracks of loaded animals? In Galla land no animal is ever taken out unless it is loaded all it can bear. Shoe tracks? Our much civilized mission boy wore ponderous native sandals studded with a pattern of great hobnails. We could have trailed those feet across all Africa.

But we cursed our own stupid tenderheartedness in impotent rage. At least, I did. My lady was too busy reviewing in her mind the pleasing prospect of another night with the hyenas under a fig tree in the rain.

Feeling for that wretched boy in his sickness, which we were not diagnosticians enough to be sure of, we had let ourselves be bluffed into hiring a horse for him to ride. And none of all those beasts, as far as we knew, was lame or had only three legs or any other useful distinguishing trail.

And the sun was already on its downward way, and the railroad was a day's journey away, and lanterns, matches, food, everything was with the lost caravan. Our hearts were too full for words.

Later on, when we finally got back to the capital, I sent that boy to the American mission hospital; and there he luxuriated in a clean white bed while white nurses ministered to him and white physicians pondered upon his mysterious pain. It was not till they talked within his hearing about the seriousness of his case and decided that the only thing to do would be to dissect out his stomach and replace it with a healthy goat's stomach, that he got up swiftly and went away.

But that was much later. There, at the Hawash, we had no time to speculate upon anything except that it must have been raining cats and dogs in the hills; for the river was coming down like a flume, rising inches as we watched. There was another smaller river about an hour's fast ride from there, which the caravan would have to cross in order to reach the railroad. We hoped that it had been raining sheep and buffaloes up in its hills and that it would stop the caravan dead at the ford.

FOR THAT ford we rode. But we edged a little too much our left, following a well defined trail. And when we reached the river we found, with sinking hearts and a vast void at the pits of our stomachs, that there was a ford there too, and that, while deep, the measly little river was crossable.

Of course, there must be other fords. Which one would our caravan take? We couldn't patrol a couple of miles of river front to lie in wait and catch it as its controlling demon of perversity sneaked it across.

We had just two courses open, either one as pleasing as the other: One was to loiter along the river bank until it was so late that we would be sure the caravan had crossed and then to start for the railroad with a vague hope of overtaking it—which meant going through thorn bush into the coming night without lanterns. The other was to make up our minds in a hurry and ride back to the Hawash, cross it somehow while there was still daylight and seek the shelter of Desta's village.

We chose the Hawash in unhesitating preference to the thorn bush. We knew a place where we had seen a dugout canoe, and we prayed during the whole of our hour's hard ride that it might still be there.

We reached the river without delay or incident, other than trying a short cut and coming out half a mile above the place where we had seen the dugout canoe—

which is not bad bush navigation. But has it ever happened to any one of the Camp-Fire to debouch on a river, thick bush on either side, and not to know whether one is above or below the desired point?

At first thought it would seem that, having found a river, one would just have to follow it and presently arrive at one's destination. But how to know whether to follow down or up?

Dark as pea soup was the flood of the Hawash rolling rapidly. But what signs does running water give of where it has been or where it is going? Soap suds? Factory chemicals? Camp débris? The Hawash had never known any of these things. And the sun was low enough to preclude flipping a coin and taking a chance one way or the other. We didn't know that our deviation and drift had been only half a mile.

But the gods of the rain relented for a moment and sent us a sign. Two crocodiles, youngish to middling; that is to say, about five feet long apiece.

From them we reasoned our course. We knew that for quite a way below the place of the dugout, the bush was full of hidden Galla villages. The river, therefore, would be intersected at several points with the drinking places of their cattle; and in dry weather there were two or three fords. Well, five foot crocodiles are too small to snatch any benefit from lying up at fords, and the cattle scare away the fish on which they feed. Therefore, said we, our crocodiles must be *above* the place of the canoe; and we struck off down river.

WE WERE more than merely flattered to find the canoe within the half hour; and relieved to the point of tears to find a man with a paddle sitting in it, even though he spoke only Galla and was on the other side of much turbulent water.

We screamed at him and he screamed back at us—and budged never an inch. Much more screaming slowly got it into our understanding that the bandit was bargaining for his price before he undertook any strenuous measures; and that his price for ferrying wealthy American travelers was one large round dollar.

So we promised. And he came across, and insisted on collecting his dollar first. It was not a comfortable ferry. A dugout canoe, loaded with three people and two saddles and the precious guns, and dragging a mule and a horse swimming alongside, is a finnicky sort of thing in fast water. But the favor of the rain gods continued with us, and the passage was consummated. The bandit was so surprised at his success that he asked for backsheesh; and we were so surprised that we gave him two and a half cents.

Atto Desta was so surprised at our sudden appearance before his hut that he forgot to offer us hospitality and we had to ask for supper. Then he apologized with vast embarrassment and routed out his whole village to supply us with its very best. Then he laid table.

Two flat baskets, black from disinfection in smoke and shiny with polished grease. It was good that the hut was too dark to permit of close examination into the interstices between the crossed fibers, which were pretty well filled up and well slicked from long use anyway. Out of a treasure bag, like a witch-doctor's, came the guest silver—a battered enamel plate, a huge spoon and two table knives, all without handles. These were all for pure swank. One ate off the baskets with one's hands, of course.

The village's best took some little time to prepare. But it was quite the best when it came. Corn bread and roasted last season's corn and horse gram. Hot milk, too, in a freshly smoked gourd and—*pièce de résistance* — boiled catfish in a black earthen pot; old, old catfish that we had left in our camp. The fare of visiting chiefs, no less, though one of the women who brought in the repast scratched uncomfortably with the *yickuk* itch.

After that it was bedtime; and once again we were constrained to feel that our friend Desta was not failing in the best manners of a host. He went out and

fetched in our horse blankets, all damp from our hard riding, and he gave us back a dry blanket—one that we had given him as a backsheesh and the only one he possessed.

But after that it seemed that he felt he had sacrificed enough. He swept a place clean for us on the floor where the roof didn't leak. For which same reason a rooster and two hens had chosen a beam there for their bedroom.

We, with our inhibitions of civilization, felt that we should assert ourselves. We said right out that there was nothing doing on the mud floor, because we knew that the huge Abyssinian fleas flourished in the warm dust of such floors. We would sleep in the bed. There *was* a bed, a sort of cradle of crooked sticks and twigs covered with hay. Desta meekly removed the litter of his belongings from the bed and then unrolled his own painted bull hide in what was clearly his customary corner of the floor. It seemed that he never slept in his bed.

We were glad to let the cow dung fire die out and to rest our smarting eyes while we slept. And in ten minutes we knew why Desta slept amongst the fleas on the floor.

It was a burning sensation, first at the wrists and neck. Something like the little red ants, but not localized as to each separate bite. It was just an all-pervading red hot smart. The dim glow of the dung fire was useless to hunt and try to catch anything. Desta, of course, possessed neither lantern nor matches. And the things, whatever they were, spread. Up our arms and down our backs. Desta heard us talking to them—heard *me*, says my lady—and he woke up and said, yes, he couldn't stand it himself and that was why he slept on the floor. Then he muttered that he was a poor man with but a poor house and went to sleep again.

But not so we. We sat on the floor with the friendly fleas and scratched ourselves; and when our bones ached we lay down and scratched ourselves. Then the cold rain came and we blew up the last spark of the fire and added more dry cattle chips and scratched ourselves. The rain passed and a thin beginning of a moon flickered between scurrying clouds, and the rooster kept thinking day was breaking and screamed his steam whistle call to each cloud. And we cursed it and scratched ourselves.

I don't know to this day which of Egypt's plagues persisted in that bed. The physicians of the American Mission Hospital don't know either. Another wanderer in Galla land told us afterward that he had met the things too. They were tiny, black, almost microscopic Galla lice. But I know all the kinds of cooties. None of them act that way. I have a hope, some day, of baiting such a trap with an unruly servant who deserves punishment and of bringing home some samples in a vial of alcohol to my good friend Dr. Mann, an entomologist of the Smithsonian Institute, who knows everything.

But that must be when I have means at hand to make brilliant light for the hunting. With the morning the pests and their burning itch were gone. Once again we paid our dollar to the bandit with the boat and dragged our animals by the neck through the Hawash River, and made straight and fast for a place near the railroad where we knew we could find food and lodging with a kindly German farmer.

And there was our caravan too. It had come in only a couple of hours before us, having wandered about in the bush till darkness forced it to make camp and having made a second leg to this place. There was all our gear, and our boy. The owners of the pack fleet had deposited their loads and had swiftly fled.

What could one say or do, then, to that foolish, faithful mission boy when one realized that he might just as well have syndicated with those wild Gallas in the loot and never have come back at all? What but give him a backsheesh?

The ROBBER BARONS *of* NANKAN PASS

By

William Ashley Anderson

AT DAWN I stood in the inn yard and looked up at the peak of the bare, rugged, conical mountain that almost blocked the valley. It was a Maxfield Parrish mountain, its crest bathed in the golden flood that swept across the Manchurian mountains to the north and east; its base, purple and ochre shadows, with a mud village straggling in the ruts of the valley below. The lofty pinnacle was cleft by a gorge; and this was spanned by a high-arched Chinese bridge, at either end of which rose the turrets of a castle. The castle could be approached only from the north, by a winding toilsome path that led up to the base of an imposing cliff hundreds of feet high.

I stared at that remote castle with irresistible fascination. Who built it? What was in it? It seemed to be one of the isolated posts that gave tactical strength to the solid barrier of the Great Wall that followed the bleak mountain ranges. Marco Polo must have looked up at it as he descended into China; dust clouds raised by conquering Mongol horsemen rolled against its buttresses. I thought to myself, what relics might I not find there now!

When I asked the inn-keeper for a guide to take me up, he became frightened, told me to dismiss the idea entirely from my mind and refused absolutely to procure me a guide. But he would give no reasons! Inquiring among the villagers, I met nothing but resistance, and emphatic warning to keep away from the place. But no illuminating information of any kind.

The best I could do was to persuade a small boy to take me as far as the base of the cliff. I had to be satisfied with this. So, eaten up with curiosity, we started out early in the afternoon, and approached within fair view of the cliff after a couple of hours' climbing. As we neared the cliffs we began to overtake a couple of coolies who were toiling upward with *kuntzes* on their shoulders, carrying buckets of water.

The small boy gave up his chattering, and became very silent. Finally he refused to go farther. I continued on alone, looking up at the beetling cliff, and wondering more and more at the mystery that was hidden within those ancient castle walls. As I drew near the coolies, they stopped, looking at me with horrified expressions and urged me excitedly to turn back.

At this point a doubt entered my head. I was completely unarmed; hundreds of miles away from help; and alone. On the other hand I still retained some of the

arrogance of the foreigner, and certainly did not intend to be turned back by a couple of coolies.

I had not advanced much farther, when suddenly voices began to call from above. I then discovered that carved steps zigzagged to the top, and that there were platforms for defense cut at different points on the face of the cliff. At these points armed men appeared, gesticulating, calling. To continue to advance in the face of this sort of opposition was of course foolish. So I stopped and began to consider. As the voices became more furiously insistent, I felt it was hopeless even to offer assurances of good character and intentions. Besides, I began to have an unpleasant suspicion of what I was deliberately walking into!

This was the border country of the *hung hutzes*, the red-beards who have cut northeast China into robber baronies, scornfully defying all government. They are notably without fear, and exercise an unmatched ferocity. One of their customs is to post a guard on a road to market, and take as tribute every tenth cart that passes. In the most casual and practical fashion they cut the feet off their prisoners to prevent their walking away and informing others of danger. Subsequently I learned that a European friend of mine, at about the time I was ascending this mountain, had been captured in this fashion. A great fire was being prepared in the inn yard, upon which the *hung hutzes* intended to burn him, when he escaped naked in a night of Manchurian winter, after digging his way through the wall of the inn. Another friend came down this same valley a few months later, a corpse, killed by bandits on the plains.

Suspicion therefore filled my mind. I raised both hands and called out as genially as I could:

"All ri t! I came; but now I go!"

At that instant four *hung hutzes* jumped to their feet not more than twenty-five yards away, and leveled rifles at me. They wore black turbans, black quilted jackets, and bandoleers and belts of cartridges. Yelling at the water coolies to stand aside, they fired point-blank at me before I could move.

It was a steep slope, and there was nothing to restrain me. But as I flew downward, bounding from rock to rock, *hung hutzes* raced down other paths to intercept me while eery voices yelled from above, and bullets chipped the rocks along the path. So long as no bullets actually hit me, there was no human being who could have beaten me down that slope.

A third of the way down I overtook the Chinese boy who had guided me up. He was yelling over his shoulder:

"*Kwei-kwei, lao-jen!* Hurry, hurry, old man! Hurry!"

This happened very shortly after the burning and looting of Peking, Tientsin and Paotingfu. That castle must have held the loot of a kingdom.

The TELLTALE MUSTACHE

A Story of the War Flyers

By H. P. S. GREENE

THE AIR of the Café Bar le Duc was full of tobacco smoke, the smell of food and harsh red wine, and the clatter of American voices. Most of the diners were quartermaster or transport officers, with a sprinkling of motorcycle dispatch riders.

In one corner, facing the door, Flying Lieutenant "Dizzy" Smith sat alone at a table still cluttered with the débris left by other diners and pecked disconsolately at a ragout of rabbit *à la chatte*. Occasionally he washed down a morsel with a swallow of the vilest variety of red wine and shuddered slightly.

"And to think," he said to himself, "that I'm the man who has often boasted that he could walk into any hamlet in France and get a good meal and something fit to drink in half an hour. The French think they can feed the Americans anything and get away with it, and they're right. This always was the worst town of its size in France ever since Verdun, and now the Americans have descended on it like a swarm of locusts and eaten and drunk everything in the place. No rum, no champagne, no eggs, no potatoes, no white bread, nothing but tomcat stew, horse meat, war bread, and the worst *pinard* to drink I ever cocked a lip over. I'll have to get out of here and find the squadron I'm ordered to first thing tomorrow. The mess can't be worse than this."

He caught sight of a small figure with the wings of a pilot on his blouse wandering toward him uncertainly among the crowded tables. The little man's face was woebegone in expression, and his long

mustache, evidently grown for the purpose of being waxed, drooped on each side of his mouth like that of a mandarin. To those who knew him well, this was a sure sign that Tommy Lang had just been on a party. If the mustache had been freshly waxed and belligerent, it would have meant that he was about to start one. His eyes brightened as he saw his fellow flyer's wings, and he headed for the table where he was sitting.

"If it isn't the Lucky Little Stiff!" said Dizzy to himself. "Come here and sit down, you little bum," he called. "Where did you come from, anyway? I haven't seen you since Issy. I thought you were out with the French."

"So I was," grumbled Tommy as he pushed a pile of dirty dishes aside. "And having a good enough time of it too, except for a while around Château-Thierry, where they had us doing contact patrol and ground strafing. But of course I had to gum it up."

"How was that?"

"Oh, I fell off the steps of the canteen and sprained my ankle one night, and the captain gave me a week's leave in Paris. Like a damn' fool, I went around to the American Air Service headquarters at the Avenue Montaigne, and they grabbed me and sent me up here to C Squadron of the Bewilderment Group to fly Flaming Coffins. But what are you doing here?"

"Me?" inquired Dizzy, "Why, I'm going up to C Squadron to fly as an observer. But don't you want anything to eat?"

"Never mind. I'll have something to drink, though. Hey, *mamselle, autre bouteille de vin.* Say, what's the matter—haven't they got anything fit to drink in this place?"

"If they have they're keeping it dark. Maybe we can get some champagne if we stick around till this mob of quartermasters clears out, but the Madame swears she hasn't got any rum."

"We'll try it anyway," said Tommy.

"But how come you're an observer? Last time I saw you, you were all for being a *chasse pilote.*"

"I know, but I got the itch at Issy, and they stuck me in the hospital washing dishes. I guess I'd be there yet if my orders to active duty as a first lieutenant hadn't come along. They couldn't keep me any longer after that. They never did cure the itch, though. When I finally did get out I was so sick of Issy I volunteered to go to Clermont and train to be a day bomber. What I really wanted was a bath, and I'd heard you could get one at Clermont.

"I'd almost finished my training there and was about ready to come up to the front when they took me off flying and put me under arrest. I hung around there for a while, but I guess they couldn't decide what to do with me, so when a hurry call came for observers they gave me a few days' training and sent me up here as an observer instead of a pilot—for punishment, I suppose. I don't see any sense to it myself, but I wanted to get to the front, so I didn't squawk."

"But what did they arrest you for?"

"Well, it's a long story. You know there's a big T. N. T. factory there that the French are awful nervous about, and they got excited and claimed I tried to blow it up."

"What did you do—fly over it?"

"Yes, I did that, too, and they fired at me with a machine gun, but that wasn't the main thing. You see, I went down town one night and missed the last car, and I couldn't find a sea-going hack, so I had to stay there over night. Next morning I was afraid I'd be late for formation, so when I got on the street car I told the motorette, or whatever you'd call the woman that ran it, that if she'd get me out to the field in time I'd give her twenty francs. There wasn't another soul on the car, and the old woman gave her the gun and went off like a bat out of hell about ten minutes before scheduled time.

"There were people waiting all along the line for the car, but she passed 'em all up. I had a bottle of rum in my pocket and took a drink and offered her one, and the way she tied into it you'd thought she hadn't had a drink for a year. When we

got out to the field I gave her another drink, and she finished the bottle. But I made the formation all right."

"What was wrong then?" demanded Tommy.

"Well, on the way back she was tighter'n a mink, and drove the car along with one hand and waved the empty bottle with the other, and down by the munition factory she ran the blamed car off the track into a freight car loaded with T. N. T. She said an American aviator had given her the rum, and the people she'd passed up along the road identified me as the one who was with her, and the French claimed I'd get her drunk on purpose so as she'd wreck the munition plant. They couldn't imagine a man giving anybody a drink unless he had a deep purpose behind it. To keep 'em quiet the major put me under arrest."

"Well, I guess you got out of it lucky at that," said Tommy judicially. "Say, go on and talk to the Madame and spill some of that French you used to be so proud of and see if you can't get her to let us have a private room and something to drink after hours. Better start at it—it's almost nine o'clock and they're starting to close up now."

Dizzy went up to the high desk where Madame held sway and entered into a long argument in fluent French he had picked up in the two years since he had come to France to drive an ambulance. After some minutes he returned to Tommy triumphant.

"The Madame says she'll let us have a room to drink champagne in at thirty francs a bottle," he announced. "In 1916 it was six francs, but it's take it or leave it at thirty now. What do you say?"

"I haven't got so much money," replied Tom, "but at that I guess I can stand a couple of bottles. How are you fixed?"

"Oh, I'm O. K.," returned Dizzy. "I couldn't spend much money while I was under arrest, and I didn't dare to take but one night in Paris on the way up here. Come on, they're starting to clean up the place for the night and we might get swept out."

THE TWO flyers went to the desk, bowed to Madame and followed her through a dark corridor into a room furnished with red upholstery, various bric-a-brac and a picture of Uncle Alphonse, who had served with more or less distinction in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870; in the middle of the room was a large table which Madame proceeded to decorate with an opened bottle of champagne and two glasses. She then departed and left the aviators to their own devices.

"Come on, let's hear the bad news," directed Dizzy. "How long have you been up with that Suicide Club, anyway?"

"Suicide Club is right," said Tom. "When I blew in they were just cleaning up the remains of what they call 'the St. Mihiel picnic'. Say, that may have been a picnic for the Americans on the ground all right, but it was an aerial picnic for the Boches. A day or two after the attack started they sent two circuses up here, the red one and the blue one, and made a lot of new aces.

"The sky was full of clouds most of the time, and we couldn't keep any kind of a formation, but they sent us on two raids every day, trying to keep the Boches from getting their stuff out of the salient. We were bombing the railroad station at Conflans mostly. We had some French squadrons under American command, too, and one of them lost thirteen planes out of eighteen one raid. They raised hell about it. One thing, though, the Boches were so busy shooting us down they didn't have much time to bother the troops on the ground.

"We had Billy Cooper for a C. O.—a hell of a nice little feller. One day I'd made one raid in the morning, and I didn't feel so good. Just as we were going to take off for another one in the afternoon Cooper ran up and made me get out, and said he was going to take in that little joy ride. He said for me to go over to where A Squadron had had some crashes trying to land after dark and try to steal some instruments off the wrecks. You know, they've got Breguets, and we're flying Flaming Coffins. Say, wait

till you've seen the damned things!

"Well, joy ride was right. They got into a cloud and broke up their formation, and when they came out they were cold meat for the Boches. Four planes were brought down in flames, and Cooper got his ankle shot off by an explosive bullet, and the dumb boy I had for an oberver got his arm full of incendiaries. They say when they tried to dig them out at the hospital the blamed things flamed up again and burned the surgeon's fingers. Yeah, Cooper got back to Toul and brought her down all right.

"After that there weren't enough men left in the squadron to make up a flight, so they sent up a lot of British trained kids for replacements. They say they like to fly Coffins because they've used them for training, though the British washed them out at the front last year. They're welcome to them as far as I'm concerned. I'd transfer to A and fly Breguets if they'd let me, though they've got a regular for a C. O., and you never know what a regular'll do. But you see that leaves me without a regular observer, and I might take you on. I've been carrying around a gunnery sergeant for ballast in practise flights. What kind of a shot are you?"

"Shot?" asked Dizzy, glad to get in a word. "Say, I'm the shootin'est fool that ever came out of Clermont, and if you don't believe me you can look at the records. They held me up as an example to the other guys as the kind of a shot a man ought to be."

"Well, you're the bird for me. What say, want to be my observer? Because I'll tell you right now, I want a damned good shot."

"Wait till I tell you how I made my record," returned Dizzy. "I was always a pretty good wing shot, so I made as good a record as anybody at the traps, and on ground targets from a plane with a machine gun. But how I made my big reputation was funny.

"One day they sent us up with camera guns in formation and told a dumb bird to go up and attack us in a Nieuport so we could practise taking pictures of him. Well, the blamed fool came up and played around for a while, but he never came within a quarter of a mile, so I didn't bother taking a shot at him, for I knew it wouldn't amount to anything. I was waiting for him to get close enough so I could get a good picture, but he never did. Instead, he went off and started pulling stunts for some girl.

"When I saw he was gone for good I practised taking pictures of the Breguet across the formation, and of course I got all perfect ones, seeing that he was flying right along with me. The instructor who gave us lectures on how to shoot didn't have sense enough to see that the pictures were of a Breguet and not a Nieuport, and as none of the other birds had any pictures to speak of because they didn't have a chance to get any, he made them a speech and asked them why didn't they be like me. He put my pictures up on the wall of the classroom as an example of perfect shooting, and I didn't have the heart to spoil his fun by telling him about it. So now you see how I came to be such a wonder as a gunner."

"Never mind," returned Tommy, "you've got brains, and we'll get along together fine. Tell the Madame to bring in another bottle.

"And now," he went on, after the order had been given, "I'll tell you why I need an extra good gunner! The other day we were practising flying formation with those replacements, and I was flying Number Two position right behind the leader. Suddenly I felt a funny little bump, and I looked up and saw the wheel of a confounded Coffin spinning round and round right over my head. Before I could duck the thing gave a lurch and sideswiped right back across the formation to where it belonged. It was that damned fool Sleepy Joe in a trance.

"Say, I was so damn' scared I left the formation and flew back home and landed. When the new C. O. got back I told him when he got ready to fly over the front to let me know, but I'd had enough practise. I don't mind being shot, but I'd hate like hell to get run into. I raised such a row he

asked me how I'd like to fly all alone up above for protection, and I told him fine, though it's supposed to be the most dangerous. So you see where'll you'll stand if you fly with me."

"You can't make me mad," answered Dizzy. "I'd hate to get run into myself."

There was a knock at the door, and Madame entered with another bottle.

"Messieurs," he said, "there is another American monsieur outside who desires company. He asked me to tell you that if he might enter and drink with you he would be glad to pay for this bottle of champagne."

"A man after my own heart," yelled Tommy, who was feeling better by this time. "Show him in."

The self-invited member immediately appeared around the doorpost, where he had been waiting for an answer to his proposition. He had evidently entertained no doubt that it would be affirmative, and in the A. E. F. he was justified in his optimism. An invitation to drink champagne at another's expense was rarely turned down. Dizzy looked at this angel curiously to see what manner of bird he might be.

He was a smooth looking duck—in fact smooth all over were the words which described him. Smooth face, smooth hair, and a smooth new serge uniform like an officer's, but lacking any distinguishing insignia. He might be some kind of field clerk or office man, Dizzy decided; but at all events he was a good mixer.

He started off at once into a stream of Army anecdote, which showed him to be familiar with the A. E. F. all over France. It was all highly impersonal, however, and Dizzy couldn't make him out. He himself was always stand-offish with strangers. Tommy, however, was just the contrary, and soon he was talking as fast as the stranger.

"By the way," remarked the latter, after ordering a second bottle of champagne. "You say you belong to that bombing group down the line. I've heard you fellows don't like your major."

"Like him!" howled Tommy, his tongue now thoroughly oiled. "Say, you don't know the half of it. By the way, Dizzy, do you know who that major is? Why, it's old Dunghill. Remember the speech he made at Tours when he took command? Were you there when that misbegotten cross-breed lined all us cadets up and said, 'I worked four years at West Point for my commission, and you young squirts are going to get yours in about six months. But I'll make 'em the hardest six months you ever saw. You think you're somebody because you're flying cadets, but before I get through with you I'll make you lower than any buck private that ever lived.'

"He was sore because the French had been treating us like gentlemen and we'd been having a good time. But that was a nice way to build up morale, wasn't it? Some bright boy in the rear rank took it all down in shorthand, though, and he turned it in, and Dunghill got relieved. But when we got to the front, why there he was in command of the group, and bad as ever. When we're going to take off for a raid he comes up and makes us open our flying suits to see if 'we're in proper uniform'. That means with choker collars buttoned up tight. How does he expect a man to keep a lookout for the Boches in a choker collar?"

The stranger clucked sympathetically, and filled everybody's glasses. Dizzy looked at him suspiciously. Who was this bird, anyway? He tried to shake a warning head at Tom, but the little flyer was off and nothing could stop him now. His limp mustache seemed to bristle with indignation as he went on.

"And then one day B and C Squadrons took off for a raid with about ten planes apiece, and three from each squadron couldn't keep up with the rest and had to turn back. You know, there's a strict order out that no bombers shall cross the lines in less numbers than a formation of six, so if you can't keep up with the rest, there's nothing to do but turn back. And those Coffins come so far from being uniform there's almost always two or three that can't keep up with the rest.

Well, this time those six planes from the two squadrons all came back and landed one right after the other. Old Dunghill thought it was a whole formation come back and he came driving out on to the field in his Cadillac as usual.

" 'What's wrong with you guys?' he yells. 'Yellow, are you? Afraid to go over the front?'

"And the funny part of it is we've been going over the front almost every day, and he's never been over in his life! And we're yellow, he says! Why doesn't he try it himself once before he gets in such a hurry to call somebody else yellow? Somebody shot off a burst with a machine gun at his Cadillac the other day when we were taking off, and he can't find out who it was, and since then he hasn't been around where there were machine guns so much."

"Do you know who it was?" inquired the stranger.

"I might have a blamed good idea, but I'm not saying a word," returned Tommy, who still had some degree of caution.

"Say, Tom," interrupted Dizzy, who would have said anything to change the subject, "how did you come to be here in town, anyway?"

"Me? Why, you know Hugh Kirby, the Southern gentleman from Mobile? He was with the pursuit group outside of town, and he brought down five Boches, so they sent him to Paris to organize a new squadron and take command of it. He beat up a Marine, and they pinched him and sent him back to his squadron under arrest. Seeing he's under arrest, he can't fly, so they gave him a touring car to play around with, and he came down to see us. The Chasse have plenty of transportation, and all we've got in our squadron is an Italian motorcycle that won't run."

"Can you imagine that?" he asked, addressing the stranger. "Here's a guy that's an ace, and instead of letting him go up and shoot some more Boches they won't let him fly just because he beat up some lousy Marine.

"He's having a pretty good time, though, so he doesn't mind it so much. He told me they were going to open the squadron bar for the third time, so seeing that I wouldn't practise flying formation any more, our C. O. gave me leave to go over and help open it. The only trouble was there were so many there and they were all so thirsty that we opened and closed it the same night.

"They took up a fund and went over to the supply of the British Independent Air Force that bombs Cologne and Coblenz and got a truckload of Scotch and gin and all kinds of stuff and they sure had one grand opening of the bar. By three o'clock this morning there were only half a dozen men and no liquor at all left, so they hung out a sign, 'Bar Closed', and I went back to bed. I'd already been there once. When I woke up this afternoon they brought me in to town here, and we'll go on out to the field in the morning."

"It must have been some party," said the stranger, "and I wish I'd been there. I might have learned a lot. Well, good night, boys."

"Say," blurted Dizzy, "what branch of the Service do you belong to, anyway?"

"Counter-espionage," answered the stranger, "and I've had a very instructive evening. Now I've got to go and make out my report. Good night."

He went out, closing the door behind him. The two flyers sat staring at each other open-mouthed. Dizzy was the first to recover.

"Do you know what counter-espionage means?" he inquired dryly.

"Of course I do," returned Tommy. "It means Intelligence Department. That guy will have a lot of nice stuff to put in his report, won't he? Criticizing my superior officer, treason and what-not. What do you suppose the penalty will be —death or only Leavenworth?"

"Cheer up," said Dizzy. "Everything you said was true, wasn't it? Besides, they didn't call you the Lucky Little Stiff for nothing. You have a good chance of being shot by some Boche before his report ever gets through. Let's have an-

other bottle and go to bed. Have you got any place to sleep?"

"Sure, I engaged a bed in that 'Y' Hotel, and maybe they can scare up another one for you. Call the Madame and order another bottle. I don't feel much like sleeping now."

DAWN the next day, after an uneasy night, found the pair pounding along through a slight mist down the road which led toward the airdrome of their group, but before they had gone far they flagged a truck headed in the same direction, and an hour later hopped off at the headquarters of their squadron.

When they went in to report they found the C. O. presiding solemnly over a dance which was being performed by several of his officers in propitiation of the god who made it rain. It seemed as if their efforts might be wasted, however, for the mist was stopping, and the sky showed signs of brightening up.

"Come on over to the barracks and we'll light a fire in the stove and get warmed up," invited Tommy. "We've got some little tin stoves they took out of the German trenches at St. Mihiel. You might as well bunk in with me. There are plenty of beds and blankets belonging to birds who got brought down until your own get here, if they ever do. You probably won't need them by that time. By the way, though, if you're going to be my observer, you'd better go on over to the group operations office and study the map and find out where the front is. I have enough to do to fly formation without worrying about where we are. That's your job."

They reached the barracks, which was gloomy and deserted except for ghosts. Tommy led the way into a small room at one end which was just big enough to hold two cots and the stove. He sat down on one of the beds and reached an inquiring hand underneath. Presently he produced a boot, and from the boot a black bottle bound with straw and bearing a brightly colored picture of a young negress. He squinted through the bottle at the light from the window, gave it an inquiring shake and remarked, as he held it out to Dizzy:

"Faithful Old Nick is still with us for a wonder. Just two snorts left. Drink hearty up to fifty per cent."

Dizzy did as requested gratefully, and felt a comforting warmth spread over his cold, damp body. An orderly stuck his head in at the door.

"Lieutenant Lang," he remarked, "you are wanted at group headquarters." He then removed his head, after a longing look at the bottle the petrified Tommy was holding in one hand.

After a moment the little flyer sighed and emptied it.

"Well, it's come already," he said. "I suppose I might as well go on and have it over with. You'd better come along in case they want you, too."

He went out and lead the way along a muddy path through the woods in which the barracks and hangars were supposed to be camouflaged, until they came to a group of large huts.

"There's the operations office," said Tommy, pointing to one of them. "Go ahead in and look over the map and find the front. They change it every day now. And you'd better make up a map and paste it on to a board for yourself, so it won't blow away when you use it in the air. They might let you fly once before they put you in jail. I'm going in to see the adjutant."

Dizzy went into the operations office and found several observers, some of whom he knew, working over their maps and correcting details from a large map of the whole Western front which hung on the wall. The others shook hands with him and made mocking condolences about his probable fate in the near future. The general consensus of opinion was that he would undoubtedly be burned alive so soon that it was hardly worth his while to bother making a map of the territory where the painful scene would take place, but they agreed to help him out of old friendship.

Suddenly Tommy burst into the room,

his eyes shining with excitement.

"What do you know, Dizzy!" he exclaimed. "They didn't want me about that counter-spy business after all. We're going to fly a Breguet with A Squadron. No more Flaming Coffins with a big tin tank under pressure for us. You know, Breguets have a tank covered with some kind of soft rubber, and they can shoot incendiaries into them all day and they won't burn because the holes close up and the gas won't burn without air. Also, I have a nice iron seat with a high back to sit on. Of course the Boches have a good shot at you, but then, observers are expendable.

"Come on, it's clearing up, and we'll probably raid before long. Finish your map and go over to the supply and draw all the flying clothes you can. It's cold at five thousand meters. Hell's fire! We haven't got any rum. I'm going over to B Squadron and see if Honest John or John Y. haven't got some. See you out on the line at A Squadron in a few minutes."

HALF an hour later Dizzy appeared on the line in front of A Squadron hangars and found seven Breguets warming up, and Tommy waiting for him. The little man was downcast from discovering a rum famine, but still enthusiastic over the chance to fly Breguets.

"Let's go," he commanded. "Get into your clothes. We are going to fly protection in a Corps d'Armée machine, above and to the rear. They don't have any of those big automatic ailerons on the bottom wings, and we can't carry much of a load of bombs—only two incendiaries on each wing—but we're faster than the bombers and carry five hours' gas. The only trouble is it's hard not to overrun the bombers.

"Come on, here's our bus over here. They've got your guns all on. Here's your bomb releases, one on each side. Now all I want to do is look out for Boches. You can tap me on the head and point them out if you see any. Never mind hanging your head over the side and counting the cars in some freight train, so as to hand in a nice report. If some Boches come up and you don't see them, you won't be able to hand in any report anyway. Well, let's go. All O.K., Sergeant?"

This is to a mechanic standing by. At an affirmative answer Tommy gave her the gun and followed the rest of the bombers who were already taxiing out on to the field. Dizzy felt strangely empty. No wonder, for it must have been almost noon, and he had had nothing to eat since coffee and a roll early that morning.

As they took off and started circling for altitude with the others, he felt somewhat numb. It seemed like taking off for any practise flight, and it was hard to realize that in a little while other men might be trying to shoot him down. He put magazines from the rack on to each of his twin Lewis guns and cocked them, and then sat down on the dinky seat at the rear of his cockpit, taking only an occasional glance over the side as they circled around. Every time he looked he saw Bar le Duc and the Meuse somewhere below him. Suddenly he felt the ship shake savagely, and stood up to see Tommy pointing below.

He studied the terrain and saw what must be Verdun, and some of the forts and towns to which he had driven an ambulance two years before. The Breguets were flying in formation now and heading northeast at a speed which showed they must have a strong wind behind them. Tommy was flying wide to the right and taking no chances on a collision.

Dizzy could see no other airplanes anywhere in the sky except one far below which was flying methodically back and forth, evidently on artillery *réglage*. He could also see several balloons. Then there were four sharp *woofs!* and four large black oily clouds appeared around him.

So this was Archie! He knew fellows always said Archie wasn't alarming, but in his experience six inch high explosive often meant dismembered men and disemboweled horses on the roads at night. There were more *woofs!* and the black

clouds were all around them, but the pilot of the leading plane kept straight on. He couldn't dodge as an observation or pursuit flyer would have done, for to change his course would have upset the calculations of his observer at his bomb sight, and ruined all chances for a successful raid.

One of the Breguets started to blow out clouds of steam and to lose altitude. Evidently the motor had been hit. Then it turned and started for the American lines. Small chance of making it, however, and cold meat for any Boches who happened along. The other bombers closed up.

"Fly formation, bomb your objective, and the devil take the hindermost," were the orders.

Ahead was a fairly large town which must be their objective, and Dizzy watched the observer in the leading plane for the signal to bomb. His own plane was not equipped with a bomb sight. As a red ball shot up from the leader he stooped and yanked at his two bomb releases. The left one worked easily, but the one on the right refused to budge.

Suddenly there was a terrific *woof!* directly underneath their right wing, and he felt the ship give a sickening lurch. He raised his head, and directly above it and hardly six feet away he saw the descending nose of a great 155 m. m. bomb! By some miracle it missed him and hurtled by the right side of the ship with a nauseating swish.

DIZZY stood up on weak knees. From the formation above he could see bombs falling all around them as they sideslipped directly under it. As they came out of the slip and headed south they were several hundred meters below and behind the other ships, which were already hightailing it for home.

Quickly the observer looked up, down and around on every side. For a wonder there were no enemy planes near, but he could see a large formation several miles away. He wondered whether they could catch them. He could feel the ship vibrate as Tommy turned on full motor and pulled his nose up in a vain endeavor to catch up with the rest.

Dizzy looked over the side and saw a town ahead of them. Squinting over the lower wing, he gave the stubborn bomb release a furious jerk. It would be no joke to land loaded on one wing. The little handle gave way, and he saw two long, red incendiary bombs leave the wing and start on their long trip to the earth. In a few moments two fires broke out in the town below. He hugged himself and turned his machine guns on it. He might as well annoy the Boches if they were trying to put the fires out, and the guns needed warming, anyway.

Again Archie cut loose furiously, but this time he was wide of the mark, and ten minutes saw them back to the American lines.

A wandering patrol of American Spads swept by and looked them over, which might have accounted for the lack of any Boches in that part of the sky. Dizzy chuckled to himself. One raid to his credit, and he had lighted a couple of fires all by himself! He must get those fires into the *communiqué*.

Then his airman's sense, unconsciously always attuned to the rhythm of the motor, detected something wrong. The Breguet was commencing to skip badly, and Tommy headed her down. Below them was a fairly large town, and after a look at his map he decided that it must be Toul. The rest of the formation had already disappeared from sight.

They were approaching a large airdrome. Tommy pointed below and shouted—

"French?"

Dizzy looked down long and carefully. There were several planes in front of the hangars, and finally he could make out that the circles on their wings were red on the outside, blue in the middle and white in the center.

"No, American," he replied.

Tommy gave her the gun and zoomed away again. Faltering but still losing but little altitude, they moved on. Ahead Dizzy saw another field. The cocardes on

the planes' wings were reassuring, for the spots in the center were blue.

"French," he yelled, tapping Tommy on the head.

The little pilot cut the gun and descended. He made a perfect landing, and several mechanics ran out and helped him taxi to a hangar. The two flyers crawled out and lighted cigarets.

"What in hell did you go into that sideslip for?" inquired Dizzy. "I was scared stiff when all those bombs fell around us, and it was worse being left all alone over Germany."

"What did *I* go into it for!" howled Tommy. "I was almost stalling so as not to overrun the formation on the inside of the turn, and that damned *woof* right under the wing *blew* us into it. And only a few little tears to show for it, too," he went on, examining the wing. "Wonder where all the parts of those things go, anyway? We might have made it home with that motor, but I thought I might as well make it safe and land at a French airdrome and be sure of a drink and a good meal."

A French lieutenant came up and welcomed them, and after being told of their trouble offered them the bar, dinner and a lodging for the night.

"I will try to get your squadron for you later," he remarked, "but it is hard to telephone since you Americans have changed the lovely names of our French towns to such ones as Podunk!"

They finally managed to get the call through, however, and later the next morning two mechanics from their squaddron arrived in a truck and went to work on the motor. From them the two flyers learned that the machine which was hit by Archie had not been heard of.

"By the way, Lieutenant Lang," remarked one of the mechanics, a corporal, "the group adjutant said he wanted to see you when you got back."

"Here it comes," groaned Tommy. "I wish we had been the ones to come down in Germany. A Boche jail might not be so much worse than an American one, and they would have forgotten all about that counter-spying stuff when we escaped, or came back after the war. Do you suppose we've got enough gas in this bus to make Switzerland?"

"Cheer up," said Dizzy consolingly. "This might be another false alarm, and we might get a chance to get brought down yet."

The repairs were made, and late that afternoon they landed on their home airdrome.

"Go on and turn in your observer's report," said Tommy, "and I'll see the adjutant. If they don't arrest me I'll meet you at the barracks and we'll go down the road to Mamselle Lucie's café for supper."

Taking off his flying clothes, the little man dragged himself slowly toward the headquarters hut. There the adjutant, a nice enough young fellow whose only fault was a dislike for flying, greeted him in a friendly manner. Tommy started as he saluted and saw a tall man with silver leaves on his shoulders, who was standing in the office.

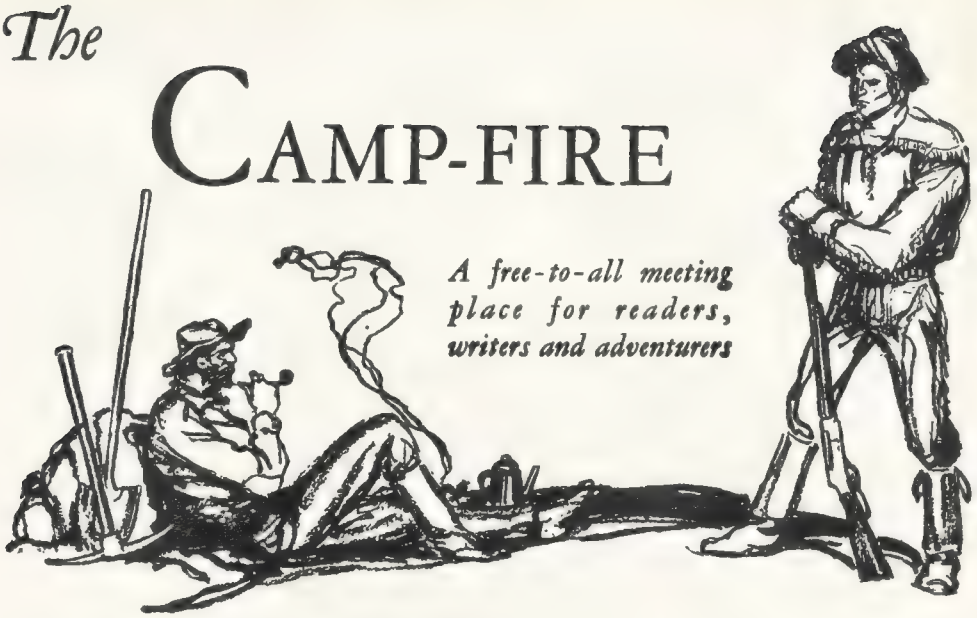
"Hallo, Tommy," said the adjutant. "Say, you knew Blink pretty well, didn't you? Met his folks and all that? I wish you'd go over his things and send them what you think they ought to have, with a nice letter. You know the thing—what a nice fellow he was and how we regretted it when he was brought down."

"I know he burned up the mess fund along with him," growled Tommy, "but all right. Was that all you wanted? Who was all the rank?" he asked, shrugging in the direction of the door by which the tall officer with the shoulder ornaments had gone out.

"Oh," said the adjutant, "that's right. You haven't heard. Why, the major has been relieved and sent back to the S. O. S., and that's our new commanding officer, Colonel Bones. He seems to be a pretty good fellow and says he's going over the lines."

A few minutes later when Dizzy arrived at the barracks he found that Tommy had already shaved, and was busy waxing his mustache.

The CAMP-FIRE



A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

Another Impostor

EXPERIENCES like the following are enough to explain why there is such as "justifiable homicide." For one, I should not blame Captain Dingle—supposing once he could catch the crook and liar who is using his name—for slicing up the culprit into cannibal jerky.

Adventure has the impostor's name and description, but refrains from publishing the name—as it is a very common one, and probably no more than a temporary alias, anyway. Injustice to some perfectly innocent person of the same name, has to be avoided.

But if some stranger represents himself as Dingle, and is five feet nine inches in height, weighs about 140 pounds, has dark brown hair, blue eyes, and is strictly American in type and speech, swat him first and investigate afterwards—for this is just the sort of man Captain Dingle is *not!* (The real author is shorter, forty pounds heavier, has brown eyes, and is English).

Comrade Friel's experience with a waster who is using his name was not a circumstance compared with mine. For four or five years now a human rat has been bumming around the whole United States, claiming to be the author of the Captain Dingle sea stories. He has been entertained and helped, and in at least one case known to me personally has taken a loan of a hundred dollars from a dear old couple on the fake that he was buying a vessel which was to make a good profit, when they would be reimbursed. The old folks gave him their savings. The only vessel he ever came near buying was also by the fake of claiming to be me, but fortunately to an old deepwater 'prentice, who failed to find in him the salty tang of the man who wrote deepwater stories.

This panhandler will be welcomed by the police in Bellingham, Washington, the coastguard in Sabine, Texas, more than one yacht and vessel broker in New York, San Francisco, Long Island, and Thousand Isles. He bought several of my books for Christmas presents to people he had fooled, inscribing them as from me. I have one here, sent to me by a disillusioned victim, to whom I sent a book properly inscribed. The one I have is inscribed: "To the best friends a man ever had. Hoping they will get as much pleasure in the reading as I got from the writing of it, while sailing alone across the Atlantic." Signed "Dingle."

Would you mind putting this in Camp-Fire? I wish you could use the man's name too. I have his photograph. Once, when I was tipped off that he was trying to get some Dodge watercars on the same system, I made a long trip to New York trying to get him. I got there the day after people got wise to him and he skipped. I have received letters from every part of Coastal America, asking me if he were I or I were he. I have got letters through various magazines reminding me of certain meetings, promises, and so forth, which never happened in my experience. One man, late U. S. Navy, reminded me of meeting me in Athens, *when I was*

eating raw steak! I was supposed to have promised this ex-gob a berth in my yacht! And raw steak! I may have chewed a fellow's ear, or eke a nose, but raw steak! Gosh!

But seriously, this swine is making my name a stench in so many places that I scarcely dare put in at a new port for fear somebody will tar and feather me for him. Won't you please put this in Camp-Fire? Some slight mention was made once, in Mr Hoffman's time, but it was not enough. And surely it's a crying shame.

Cheer oh! Sincerely,

—DINGLE, Schooner *Gauntlet*, Nantucket, Mass.

The Legion of Valor

THIS is probably one of the most exclusive organizations in the world. *Adventure* is very glad to bring it to the notice of comrades who may be eligible for membership.

The Legion of Valor is an organization of soldiers who have been decorated for extraordinary heroism in action. There are a number of soldiers in active service throughout the world, who are eligible to membership in the Legion, and who do not know of its existence. Also a number of men who are not now in active service. The writer believes that a number of them might be reached through your magazine, and we are requesting that, if consistent with your policy, you make mention of the order, and say that its purpose is to keep in touch with those men who have been honored.

The yearly dues are insignificant. We meet for a few days each year somewhere in the United States. Only those men who have received the Congressional Medal of Honor or the Distinguished Service Cross, are eligible to membership; and of course, there are not very many. Our membership to date is 280. If you will run a little notice to the effect that full particulars concerning the organization may be obtained by writing Sgt. Ben Prager, Ajt., Allegheny County Court House, Pittsburgh, Pa., we will feel greatly obliged.

—DAN MACSWEENEY, Union Trust Bldg., Pittsburgh, Pa.

A Strategical Kingdom

COMRADE SACKEN arises to volunteer an interesting answer to a question asked in Camp-Fire. Somehow or other it really seems that any king named Clarence *ought* to be forced to abdicate!

Howard X. Whitener wants information about the Mosquito Indians.

Great Britain created the Kingdom of Mosquitia so as to obtain the help of these Indians and the numerous white pirates who had settled on the east coast of Nicaragua, in her wars with Spain. The kingdom existed until 1893 when King Clarence was forced to abdicate. Since then the territory has been an integral part of Nicaragua.

Albert Wehde, in "Since Leaving Home," gives a brief history of the country and an amusing account of the coronation of its last king.—E. V. SACKEN

Fight On Foot

COMRADE ELWOOD was moved to verse by his appreciation of the Major Wheeler-Nicholson novelette. Several more stories by this gifted author are scheduled for coming issues.

Although I am now a full fledged traveling salesman, I have two years service with the cavalry under my belt. Thought that Malcolm Nicholson's story, "Fight On Foot!" was great stuff, and felt inspired to commit the following because of it.

You can sing of high adventure
  Of a life that's full and bold—
From the shores of festered China,
  To the Arctic, dead and cold—

You can tell of thrilling moments,
  When your life hung by few threads,
In the fevered trackless jungles,
  Where the natives fancy heads—

But you'll never know real living
  Or a thrill that's worth a hoot,
Until you've heard one curt command—
  "Dismount and fight on foot!"

—PHILIPS ELWOOD, 593 McDonough Street, Brooklyn, New York.

Norman Reilly Raine

ON THE occasion of publishing his second *Adventure* tale—"The Little Things," which appears in this number—Mr. Raine tells of his fiction background. A colorful one it is, indeed!

I was born in Wilkes-Barre, Pa., in 1894, on the same day in which Edward the Prince was born in London, from which point our mutual interests diverge. The acquirement of knowledge was interrupted—supplemented, perhaps—by several trips to the Old World between the ages of one and twelve years, to which early depravity I owe my present love of roaming. Educated in the United States and England the years immediately preceding 1914 found me a newspaper reporter on Buffalo papers until the Big Story broke in August and I donned a Canadian uniform. Was given a commission on the field and walked the chalkline of elemental emotions for nearly five hectic years, during actions at Ypres, the Somme, Vimy Ridge, Passchendaele, Amiens, Arras, and subsidiary engagements. After demobilization at Toronto in March, 1919, the seed of my youthful voyagings came into active

germination and bore successful fruit, for since that time I have covered most of the globe.

Turning the diamond of experience before your evening blaze, the facets flash with the blue of the skies of the world; the white of Canadian snows; the crimson gleam of the Western Front; the lambent green of terraced hillsides on the Inland Sea of Japan; the soft pink of blossom mist on the rugged heights of Manchuria; the yellow gleam of Nubian Desert sands; the living turquoise of a Bengal sky; the cold jade of a distant Aleutian Island, tipped by the storm-light of a North Pacific winter day; a pool of vivid carnelian amid the purple shadows of Australian gum trees; the gold of a burnished idol in a temple of Hong-Kong; the russet stain of battering seas on the plates of a Danish tramp, the dreamy mauve of the Tasmanian dusk; the fluttering emerald pennant on the stern of an Arab *dhow;* the rainbow shimmer of tropic fish in the depths of a lost lagoon; the scarlet flow of a wastrel's life on the floor of a Brisbane "pub"; the rippling beauty of an Eastern dawn in the Straits of Bab-el-Mandeb.

Had you the patience and I the space, the subtleties of these far glimpses might be infinitely prolonged, and yet what would be the use? The world is sweet, the world is good, wherever we be! If you, too, are a seeker after loveliness and the eternal verities, come with me on a morning, and I will show you from my window a sight that, for beauty, a blade of grass may equal, but which the wonders of the world can not excel—a slender Canadian silver birch against the blue spring sky.—NORMAN REILLY RAINE.

Cowboys in the East

FROM Al Miller, 723 Fifty-third Street, Brooklyn, New York, comes a letter, telling of a club he, Bill Miller, and Cheyenne Al MacDowell have formed, known as the—Z Ranch Association. Membership is restricted to riders of western range experience, buckaroos, steer wrestlers and riders, calf ropers and rodeo performers. Perhaps there are some cowboys marooned in this section, who would care to write Mr. Miller.

Scars On The Trees

ARTHUR O. FRIEL has an interesting word concerning the factual background of his novelette, "Coincidence," which appears in this number of the magazine.

This tale of "Coincidence" is so full of fact that I am using the true names of some real people, and narrating some actual events.

In the time of Funes (1913-21) a family named Carasquel lived at Babilla Flaca. And four Carasquel boys joined the Funes outfit at Zamuro, outpost of Atures. And the sergeant in charge did exactly what Matanza does to them in this story, including the sending of Vicente to bring up the rest of the family. And later on Matanza went as messenger down-river, became ill on the way back, sought relief at Babilla Flaca without knowing where he was, and got the same quick and permanent cure described herein.

I cannot vouch for correctness of spelling in the name Carasquel; but I spell it in accordance with the pronunciation used by the rivermen. As for Matanza, I've had to invent his name, because the pencilled notation in my Orinoco diary has become so blurred that I can make out only the letters "Mat . . ." But that's close enough.

Beheading, I might add, was the usual mode of execution in the Funes gang. It saved bullets, and looked more interesting; they liked to see the blood squirt. At Atures, and also at Maipures, can still be seen trees with old gashes in the bark, neck high. Those scars mean something, *amigos!*—A. O. FRIEL.

"They Wear Forever"

THAT, at least, was the reputation enjoyed by these robes and blankets in the days when the old-fashioned weaves were in more common use than now. Comrade Bertha Little arises to tell of them from her experience.

I saw an inquiry in your magazine in regard to the old-time all wool, hand made Navajo Indian blankets and am writing to tell you that in some of the desolate places on the reservation, the old-time blankets are still made. The wool is clipped by the men from the Navajo sheep, then carded, spun on a hand reel, dyed and woven by the women, into the blankets (or rugs) that have become famous throughout the country.

As a teacher for a number of years, among the Navajos, I often visited the hogans (houses) with the schoolgirls and watched the processes of blanket making. I have a collection of six of the old-fashioned, hand made blankets and can get more by sending to my friends in some of the out of the way places on the reservation. Commercial dyes are used at the present time but in this respect, only, these blankets differ from the weaves of one hundred years ago. Some traders encourage the use of Germantown yarn but I prefer the old-time weaves, for my own use. The blankets made from black, white and gray and covered with symbolical designs, are the most interesting, and many of them are of the thickness of Oriental rugs.

—BERTHA LITTLE, 2357 Fifth Avenue, San Diego, Calif.

HARDPAN VALUES

Met a feller yesterday I used to know in Candle;
Worked the claim below him in the fall of '99;
He was husky back in them days; lean an' tough, an' hard to handle;
But a guy in need could have his bottom nugget, any time.

A year don't seem so long, but twenty-five—that's half o' fifty:
I hardly knowed this jasper when I met him yesterday;
He's got a big bay winder, and his eyes are bleak an' shifty;
His face is fat an' flabby, an' what hair he's got is gray.

We'd been good pals up there, but human nature's kinda funny;
It's twenty years or better since he quit an' went Outside;
I remember hearin' once he'd made himself a flock of money,
Bought hisself a seat in Congress, an' a Broadway Follies bride.

He knowed me, right enough, an' tried to act purt' nearly human;
A *leetle* condescendin', which he couldn't help, o' course;
Here I was nearin' fifty, without bank account or woman,
While he'd gathered seven millions, an' had got his third divorce.

We set an' gassed awhile about "the good old days" up yonder,
When he was "Skookum Jim", an' I was called the "Bluegrass Kid";
Of the booze we used to punish, an' the dust we used to squander;
How the things we wisely planned on were the things we never did.

I called to mind the time pneumony caught big Bruce McGavin;
No dogs—six feet o' snow—the doctor forty miles away;
I'd frosted both my hoofs an' couldn't stir outside the cabin;
"I'll take him in," says Jim; "I need terbacker, anyway."

He made it through in thirty hours, an' would have made it quicker,
But half the time he packed that ravin' Scotchman on his back.
Six hours of sleep—some ham an' eggs—a shot or two of likker—
Then he took his plug of Horseshoe an' mushed down the homeward track.

A score or more of sim'lar stunts from out the past came thronging;
He snapped at each one hungrily, an' licked up every crumb;
'Twas kinder sad to see a man so wishful-like, an' longing
To recall the man he once had been—an' see what he'd become.

Then, sudden-like, he caught hisself, like one who's lost his balance;
His eye went bleak again, his ardent interest seemed to cool.
"That stuff's all right for kids," says he; "But men should turn their talents
To the things of weight an' value, an' should cease to act the fool."

He lights a new perfecto, an' says he to me: "Old Bummer,
You've wasted most your life here, chasin' things you'll never get.
Come on with me; I'll let you run a plant I bought last summer,
An' with me to show you how, you'd ought to make a million yet."

I must have smiled a leetle mite superior, I reckon,
As I thanked him for his offer; for his face went red an' hot;
"But," says I; "there's lots of unmapped spots that call, an' wink, an' beckon,
An' my grub-stake's packed an' ready, an' I'm set to see the lot."

"They say that strike on Russian Lake's as rich as two Bonanzas;
There's a line-up now in Wrangell, for to rush the Cassiar;
Old Wildcat Redmond's wired to his old side-kick back in Kansas
To 'come at once'; that means he'd struck it rich on Chandelar.

"Jack Reed, from the Klahina, is in town, an' *isn't* boozin'—
(The likker starts his tongue, an' he's not sayin' what he's found);
But he's hired a crew of men, an' bought a duplex pump for sluicin'—
No, thank ye kindly, pardner; I'll jest have to stick around."

His face was tense an' eager; in his eye I caught a glitter
That was speakin', plain an' eloquent, of things he'd jest denied;
But he shook his head, regretful, an' his twisted smile was bitter,
As his gaze swept down the bulk of fat encased within his hide.

His steamer's whistle warned us then he'd barely time to make it;
He puffed aboard an' faced me as the "cast-off" whistle blew.
"That job is yours whenever you decide to come an' take it;
But"—his old-time grin flashed out again—"You're crazy if you do!"

—LARRY O'CONNER

Readers' Votes

A READER writes in to say emphatically that he doubts the value of conducting a reader's vote to determine what types of stories and what authors should merit preference in our magazine. He points out that only a meager fraction of a magazine's public ever takes advantage of an editor's invitation to make articulate its likes or dislikes; that the verdict is not indicative of general taste, for the same people always respond, the rest remaining soundly silent; that, after all, the editor, his judgment refined and crystallized by wide experience, is the best authority, and that his choice of stories ought to be unquestioned and absolute.

Of course there is truth in the above view, and it is certainly flattering to an editor's ego to find such stanch confidence in himself, yet is it the *whole* truth? Granted that the response from readers is limited, such still is the sole means at an editor's disposal of obtaining a direct and unequivocal measure of patrons' tastes. Circulation figures tell an editor *how* a magazine is selling; unfortunately they don't tell *why*. And though the tabulated vote of readers need not be his only guide in choosing stories (as indeed it isn't, for he will buy a truly *good* story when and where he finds it) it is nonetheless an important one—one that he should respect, take cognizance of, and for which, if he is like myself, he is sincerely grateful.

Slinging Mud

COMRADE COPPAGE of the United States Marines in Nicaragua, sends in the following letter, which I am glad to print just at this time—when the hands of politicians are on all the lanyards, bringing into action all the big guns (and the pea-shooters) of the Presidential campaign.

I am all riled up. With me it is a case of put up or shut up; so excuse me while I put up, will you?

This talk about us Marines being the soldiers of Wall Street, oppressing weak nations and in general having a big time at the other fellow's expense.

It was not damn fools who started this line of talk. It was a very wise, slick party who realizes very

well that Americans believe 'most everything they see in print.

All right, I can play at this game too. And perhaps when you see the truth in print, in plain American language, you will believe it. I am one of the Leathernecks loaned to the Nicaraguan people by our own Government, and if I have no guile left in me, the reason is simply that it is all melted out. This climate would be good for the honorable Senators who proposed to stop our allowances so we would leave here. Do they think we want to stay in this place for the fun of it?

Why are we here in the first place? "Because we were ordered here by higher authority." We don't ask how come we got this job handed us, we took it over and some of our gang have passed out holding it down. So why climb our frames? You have a bunch of the best soldiers in the world asking one question: "What is the matter with the folks back home?"

Don't knock us and call us names; we are a proud lot and touchy as hell. If you want us out of here, give us orders to that effect through the same medium that ordered us down here. It is low-down to shoot a man's dog because you are mad at the man.

This life is supposed to be an easy snap is it, at big wages? Surely if we are working for Wall Street we are drawing big pay, no doubt. Good, I will hand you a slice out of my own personal life for the period of January, 1928. Remember, I had it easy too, compared with the majority of our bunch here at the same time.

On January 3rd, I was sent here from Headquarters of the Guardia Nacional de Nicaragua, in Managua, to take command of this Sub-Division. The town of El Viejo (meaning the old) has a population of about three thousand. My headquarters are in this town. The country around is thickly settled and I have never been able as yet to cover it all, regardless of the fact that I spend from one to two-thirds of my time in the saddle. Being the only American in this section I would soon grow lonesome if I did not keep busy. Am I busy, policing this area with the sole aid of ten native soldiers, capturing thieves, murderers, wild-eyed drunks, shooting mad dogs, recovering stolen animals and investigating rumors of armed bandits? In my spare time I train my men, hold drills and inspections, study Spanish, the laws of Nicaragua and general orders. Then to be sure that I earn my money from month to month, I am making a road map of my entire district showing the traveled roads and trails. In the heat and dust, this is a six months' job.

My food is simple but good. Boarding at a native home I get nothing but native cooking. Gosh, but I get hungry for good home cooked food like my mother makes! At night I dream of ice-cold buttermilk, hot biscuits, spare-ribs and pie. You folks who get all these regularly can not understand how it can mean so much to us.

The heat, the dust, the insects, the smells; they all leave their mark. Unseen, unnameable diseases which make a victim of one in a week. The ever present buzzards who can hardly wait until a thing dies to start tearing at it. Did you hear of the Marine who was wounded in one of the first battles down here, and lay for hours with his pistol in hand keeping back an ever growing circle of impatient buzzards? Gruesome, is it not? And your eyes are the first thing they pick at. Nice to remember.

Such is life in the tropics. We don't growl about it. Other things more important to attend to.

Eighty-two dollars was the sum total of my pay for the month of January 1928, and my entire living expenses came out of this. What are we down here for; surely not money?

We are here from a sense of duty, and while we will be glad to come home when we can do so honorably we prefer to stay on the job until that time. But we want our own people to believe in us and back us up, heart and soul.

—ALTON O. COPPAGE, Cadet Guardia Nacional de Nicaragua. Private U. S. M. C.

I can't imagine just what sort of propagandist bilge Private Coppage must have come across—but surely hope that he and his gallant comrades will take it no more seriously than they would the spoutings of a street corner fountain pen fakir. America has not forgotten its heroes of Belleau Wood, Chateau Thierry and other salients; it does *not* think of them as cynical hirelings of a money power, or as meddling busybodies in uniform. Never! Whatever may be the rights or wrongs of our position in Nicaragua—and at the moment of this writing (March 16th) it seems that the diplomatic situation is more muddled than ever—the hearts of real Americans are with our men and with Old Glory, wherever they may be.

—ANTHONY M. RUD

ASK *Adventure*

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Decorations

ORIGIN and significance of the Croix de Guerre and the Legion of Honor.

Request:—"Would you fully describe the French war decoration, the Croix de Guerre? Also the medal of the Legion of Honor of France? I would greatly appreciate any information you would care to give me with reference to these decorations."—DONALD MATTHEWS, Cleveland, Ohio.

Reply, by Lieut. Glen R. Townsend:—The French Croix de Guerre is a military decoration which was established during the early part of the World War. Its purpose is to recognize the services of the officers and enlisted men of the French army and its Allies performed in the theater of operations.

The decorations consists of a Maltese cross of bronze metal suspended from a ribbon of alternate narrow red and wide green vertical stripes. The stars and palms worn on the ribbon indicate the origin of the citation on which the award is based. A bronze star indicates a citation by a regiment or a brigade; a silver star a citation by a division; a gold star citation by an army corps and the bronze palm indicates citation in the orders of an army.

In case of second and subsequent awards the appropriate star or palm is added to the decoration. Should one person receive the award of five bronze palms he may replace them with one silver palm. When the service ribbon is worn instead of the decoration itself the palms or star is worn on the ribbon and if there is more than one award the device representing the senior award is placed on the right.

About 12,000 awards of the French Croix de Guerre were made to American soldiers during the World War.

THE LEGION OF HONOR is the oldest and highest of the French decorations. It was established by Napoleon to reward services in both civilian and military life. The order is divided into five classes, the lowest being Chevalier, then Officer, Commander, Grand Officer and Grand Cross. In time of peace the original award to an individual is usually made in the lowest grade. He must then serve in that grade and in each successive grade for a stated period before being eligible for promotion to the next higher grade, promotions being made as a reward for additional services. In time of war, and sometimes in time of peace, especially in the case of foreigners, original awards are made in the higher classes.

The badge of the order is a white enameled star surmounted by a laurel wreath and suspended from a ribbon of red watered silk. It is silver for the grade of Chevalier and gold for all other grades and the grade is distinguished by the manner in which the badge is worn. The two highest classes wear the star of the order in addition to the badge. The service ribbon is plain for the Chevalier. The Officer wears a rosette on the service ribbon, the Commander a silver bowknot, Grand Officer a silver and gold bowknot and Grand Cross a gold bowknot. Similar devices may also be worn with civilian clothing to indicate possession of the decoration.

More than a thousand Americans were decorated with various grades of the Legion of Honor for services in the World War.

Trade Dollar

THE INTERESTING history of an American coin intended for circulation in China.

Request:—"At a money exchange in Shanghai recently I was given a U. S. trade dollar. As I have never seen one before am interested in their history and present value. (Date 1876.)"—G. A. ANDERSON, Hong Kong, China.

Reply, by Mr. Howland Wood:—The Trade Dollar that you write about was made by this Government between the years of 1873 and 1885. They were not intended for circulation in the United States, but for export to China to compete with the old Spanish and later Mexican dollars that for a century had been the chief circulating medium in the Treaty ports. Not having gold back of them they circulated at their silver value, which in the early days was about the same as their face value.

The Chinese never took well to our Trade dollars, and the production of these greatly dwindled away, so that in the 80's very few were made. About 1887 the Government recalled and redeemed all of those that were offered. Since that date they are not redeemable and are worth only their silver content, today somewhere about 30 cents each, except perhaps to collectors.

It is an interesting thing that the weight of these dollars was based not on the American dollar but on the Spanish dollar, and in consequence is a few grains heavier than our own silver dollar. Your dollar today is worth just about its silver value.

Fiji Islands

A SOUTH SEA ISLAND city that boasts a cable station, a Carnegie Library and a population half of which is Hindu.

Request:—"I am interested in the Fiji Islands. Could a young man going down there land any kind of job?"—A. B. JOHNSTON, Vancouver, B. C.

Reply, by Mr. J. S. Meagher:—There are more than two hundred isles and islets in the Fiji group. Of these about eighty are inhabited. Viti Levu is the largest island of the group and here the capital, Suva, is located. Suva, although a scattered community situated around a bay, and sloping down on terraces to the sea, is the largest community in the South Seas.

It has many of the amenities of civilization, something unusual in the broad areas and expanse of the South Pacific. Among numerous public buildings is to be found a Carnegie Library. A cable station keeps the community in touch with the outside world. Suva is also a trade center, and exports sugar, molasses, copra, mother of pearl and bêche-de-mer and sends pineapples and bananas to New Zealand.

The population of the islands is estimated at about 160,000. Among this number there are about 70,000 Hindus, who were originally imported to work on the sugar plantations. At least half of the people in Suva are Hindus. The white population is not over four or five thousand. The natives were at one time the fiercest of the islanders and are of mixed Melanesian and Polynesian stock, having thick woolly hair and black skins. Today they are pretty well civilized and are considered model citizens.

The parts of Levuka and Lautoka are reached by inter-island steamer from Suva, are like the usual South Seas small port, consisting of a single street running along the beach, some residences, etc., back of this and a wharf for the steamer and schooners.

Outside of places of this description it is a native village proposition, and wild bush country. As there is abundant rainfall in the Fijis, the country is usually very fertile and there are considerable plantations to be found here. Sugar is one of the principal exports and there are many canefields and several sugar mills. Rice is also grown extensively.

As regards getting a job, this is of course a matter of speculation. Getting a job to suit one is rather a hard proposition in islands of this description, especially if one has no definite idea. You might be able to pick up a job of some kind and again you might not; you take a chance, that's all. Companies operating in these islands are usually swamped with applications for the better class of jobs, from men who want to go on foreign service, and there is an opening only occasionally.

Forest Rangers

QUALIFICATIONS necessary to join these guardians of our National forests.

Request:—"I would appreciate any information you can give me about the position of forest ranger.

Could you tell me where and when the examination is held for this position? And where I could get the information to enable me to pass this examination?

Would it be necessary to go to school to obtain this information? I'd prefer not to go to school if any other source of information were available.

I am a high school graduate and have done much hunting and nature studying. I mention this for what you may think it's worth."—WARNER A. BROWN, Rome, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. Ernest W. Shaw:—Write the U. S. Civil Service Commission, Washington, D. C., for application papers and points where examination is held. It is given at all National Forest headquarter towns and at some few other points. There is no one place that I know of where one can get information which will enable him to pass this examination. It

is not the desire of the Government that men should study up or cram in order to pass it. Rather they are looking for men whose past experience would permit of their passing it with creditable rating without study.

I understand there are a few correspondence schools that advertise to fit men to pass it, but they can not make promises of a student's passing for the reason that no one outside of the Commission has any idea of what the questions will consist, prior to the opening of the papers before the assembled class on the morning of the day given, and it is held at the same hour and same date throughout the country.

One should have some knowledge of surveying and mapping. Know the number of feet and rods in a mile and the acres in a square mile, in a section of land, in a township. Also the number of square feet in an acre. He should have some knowledge of the methods used in subdividing the public domain and the markings of the various corners to identify them. He should have had experience in logging, sawmilling, ranching and with horses and livestock. Also fire fighting. Much of these matters one can post himself on by reading, but there is no one set of books containing it all. Write the Forester, Forest Service, Washington, D. C., for a copy of the Use Book. It will give you very real information as to duties, salary, service, etc.

One does not sign up for any given period. If you pass the exam you will receive an offer of appointment from some Forest supervisor in some State, usually the State in which you took the exam. If you accept, you will be given a temporary appointment, which becomes automatically permanent provided you make good during the first year or probationary period. When appointment is received, you take the oath of office, and are ready to enter on duty.

Salary is $1,500 *per annum* to start. Rangers when given a district, are allowed certain sums for travel when away from headquarters, and for forage allowance, both if actually expended. It is received as reimbursement for moneys spent. If one is not a resident of the West with the necessary outfit, he will find it rather expensive to outfit himself properly. Horses, saddles—riding and pack—bedding, etc. The Service supplies tents and tools, and in most instances headquarter dwellings and barn with out-buildings.

I DOUBT if a man could properly outfit himself for less than $250, and from that up to $500 or more depending on the quality of outfit. It is no uncommon thing for experienced men to pay as much as $200 for a horse. Some men seem to get along with one or two, but most men find that they have to have at least three and up to five and six, depending on size of district and how hard it is on horseflesh.

When in the Service I usually had two or three top saddle horses and two pack mules. Never had less than $1,000 tied up in my outfit. I trained my horses to stay close to camp and come to me when I called or whistled. My mules would follow my saddle horses anywhere all day with loads on their backs. They were broke to mountains and plains work, and I knew just what they could do under any given circumstances and so knew what to expect of them. For the kind of stock I have in mind I would pay $200 or $250 just as readily as $30 for green unbroken stock.

Your experience in nature study and hunting might or might not be of special benefit. All such things are helpful in training a man for outdoor work, but they do not enter often in the actual performance of duty.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.

2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.

3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.

4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing *Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.*—JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Small Boating *Skiff, outboard small launch river and lake tripping and cruising.*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, California.

Canoeing *Paddling, sailing, cruising; equipment and accessories, clubs, organisations, official meetings, regattas.*—EDGAR S. PERKINS, 841 Lake St., Oak Park, Illinois.

Yachting BERIAH BROWN, Coupeville, Wash., or HENRY W. RUBINKAM, Chicago Yacht Club, Box 507, Chicago, Ill.

Motor Boating GEORGE W. SUTTON, 6 East 45th St., New York City.

Motor Camping JOHN D. LONG, 610 W. 116th St., New York City.

Motor Vehicles *Operation, operating cost, legislative restrictions, public safety.*—EDMUND B. NEIL, care *Adventure*

All Shotguns *including foreign and American makes; wing shooting.* JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers *including foreign and American makes.*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3 Box 75, Salem, Ore.

Edged Weapons, *pole arms and armor.*—ROBERT E. GARDNER, 429 Wilson Ave., Columbus, Ohio.

First Aid on the Trail *Medical and surgical emergency care, wounds, injuries, common illnesses, diet, pure water, clothing, insect and snake bite; industrial first aid and sanitation for mines, logging camps, ranches and exploring parties as well as for camping trips of all kinds. First-aid outfits. Health hasard of the outdoor life, arctic, temperate and tropical zones.*—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb.

Health-Building Outdoors *How to get well and how to keep well in the open air, where to go and how to travel, right exercise, food and habits, with as much adaptation as possible to particular cases.*—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb.

Hiking CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M.D., Falls City, Neb.

Camping and Woodcraft HORACE KEPHART, Bryson City, N. C.

Mining and Prospecting *Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect; how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc.*—VICTOR SHAW, Loring, Alaska.

Forestry in the United States *Big-game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild animal life in the forests.*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry *Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.*—WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, care *Adventure.*

Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada *General office, especially immigration, work; advertising work, duties of station agent, bill clerk, ticket agent, passenger brakeman and rate clerk. General Information.*—R. T. NEWMAN, P. O. Drawer 368, Anaconda, Mont.

Army Matters, United States and Foreign LIEUT. GLEN R. TOWNSEND, Fort Snelling, Minn.

Navy Matters *Regulations, history, customs, drill, gunnery; tactical and strategic questions, ships, propulsion, construction, classification; general information. Questions regarding the enlisted personnel and officers except such as contained in the Register of Officers can not be answered. Maritime law.*—LIEUT. FRANCIS GREENE, U. S. N. R., 231 Eleventh St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

U. S. Marine Corps LIEUT. F. W. HOPKINS, Marine Corps Fleet Reserve, Box 1042, Medford, Oregon.

State Police FRANCIS H. BENT, JR., care *Adventure.*

Royal Canadian Mounted Police PATRICK LEE, c/o William H. Souls, 1481 Beacon St., Boston, Massachusetts.

Horses *Care, breeding, training of horses in general; hunting, jumping, and polo; horses of the old and new West.*—THOMAS H. DAMERON, 911 S. Union Ave., Pueblo, Colo.

Dogs JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal *Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Museum of American Indians, 155th St. and Broadway, N. Y. City.

Taxidermy SETH BULLOCK, care *Adventure.*

Herpetology *General information concerning reptiles (snakes, lizards, turtles, crocodiles) and amphibians (frogs, toads, salamanders); their customs, habits and distribution.*—DR. G. K. NOBLE, American Museum of Natural History, 77th St. and Central Park West, New York, N. Y.

Entomology *General information about insects and spiders; venomous insects, disease-carrying insects, insects attacking man, etc.*—DR. FRANK E. LUTZ, Ramsey, N. J.

Ichthyology GEORGE S. MYERS, Stanford University, Box 821, Calif.

Stamps H. A. DAVIS, The American Philatelic Society; 3421 Colfax Ave., Denver, Colo.

Coins and Medals HOWLAND WOOD, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., New York City.

Radio *Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.*—DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J.

Photography *Information on outfitting and on work in out-of-the-way places. General information.*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, New Jersey.

Linguistics and Ethnology *(a) Racial and tribal tradition, history and psychology; folklore and mythology. (b) Languages and the problems of race migration, national development and descent (authorities and bibliographies). (c) Individual languages and language-families; interrelation of tongues, their affinities and plans for their study.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 W. 23rd St., New York City.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung ROBERT W. GORDON, care of *Adventure.*

Track JACKSON SCHOLZ, 303 W. 107 St., New York City.

Tennis FRED HAWTHORNE, Sports Dept., New York *Herald Tribune*, New York City.

Basketball JOE F. CARR, 16 E. Broad St., Columbus, Ohio.

Bicycling ARTHUR J. LEAMOND, 469 Valley St., South Orange, New Jersey.

Swimming LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 260 Washington St., N. Y. C.

Skating FRANK SCHREIBER, 2226 Clinton Ave., Berwyn, Ill.

Skiing and Snowshoeing W. H. PRICE, 160 Mance St., Montreal, Quebec.

Hockey "DANIEL," *The Evening Telegram*, 73 Dey St., New York City.

Archery EARL B. POWELL, Port Angeles, Washington.

Boxing JAMES P. DAWSON, The New York *Times*, Times Square, New York City.

Fencing JOHN V. GROMBACH, 60 East 34 Street, New York City.

The Sea Part 1 *American Waters.* Also ships, seamen, shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, small boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America, marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (See next two sections.)—BERIAH BROWN, Coupeville, Wash.

The Sea Part 2 *Statistics and records of American shipping.*—HARRY E. RIESEBERG.

The Sea Part 3 *British Waters.* Also old-time sailoring.—CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 4 *Atlantic and Indian Oceans; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits; Islands and Coasts.* (See also West Indian Sections.)—CAPT. DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 5 *The Mediterranean; Islands and Coasts.*—CAPT. DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 6 *Arctic Ocean (Siberian Waters).*—CAPT. C. L. OLIVER, care *Adventure.*

Hawaii DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

South Sea Islands JAMES STANLEY MEAGHER, 5316 Pine Street, Inglewood, Calif.

Philippine Islands BUCK CONNOR, L. B. 4, Quartzsite, Ariz.

Borneo CAPT. BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure*.

★**New Guinea** *Questions regarding the policy of the Government or proceedings of Government officers not answered.*—L. P. B. ARMIT, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, *via* Sydney, Australia.

★**New Zealand, Cook Islands, Samoa.** TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand.

★**Australia and Tasmania** ALAN FOLEY, 18a Sandridge Street, Bondi, Sydney, Australia.

Asia Part 1 *Siam, Andamans, Malay Straits, Straits Settlements, Shan States and Yunnan.*—GORDON MACCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York.

Asia Part 2 *Annam, Laos, Cambodia, Tongking, Cochin China.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

Asia Part 3 *Southern and Eastern China.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

Asia Part 4 *Western China, Burma, Tibet.* CAPT. BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure*.

★**Asia Part 5** *Northern China and Mongolia.*—GEORGE W. TWOMEY, M. D., 60 Rue de l'Amirauté, Tientsin, China, and DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 West 23rd St., N. Y. C.

Asia Part 6 *Japan.*—SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL, San Rafael, Calif., and O. E. RILEY, 4 Huntington Ave., Scarsdale, New York.

Asia Part 7 *Persia, Arabia.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure*.

Asia Minor.—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

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Africa Part 7 *Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand.*—CAPTAIN F. J. FRANKLIN, Adventure Camp. Via Box 335, Azusa, California.

✠**Africa Part 8** *Portuguese East.*—R. G. WARING, 14837 Grand River Ave., Detroit, Michigan.

South America Part 1 *Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile.*—EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure*.

South America Part 2 *Venezuela, the Guianas, Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentine and Brazil.*—PAUL VANORDEN SHAW, 457 West 123rd St., New York, N. Y.

West Indies *Cuba, Isle of Pines, Haiti, Santo Domingo, Porto Rico, Virgin and Jamaica Groups.*—CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif.

Central America *Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala.*—CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif.

Mexico Part 1 *Northern. Border States of old Mexico, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

Mexico Part 2 *Southern, Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan.*—C. R. MAHAFFEY, 236 Fox Ave., San José, Calif.

Mexico Part 3 *Southeastern. Federal Territory of Quintana Roo and states of Yucatan and Campeche.* Also archeology.—W. RUSSELL SHEETS, 301 Popular Ave., Takoma Park, Md.

Newfoundland.—C. T. JAMES, Bonaventure Ave., St. Johns, Newfoundland.

Greenland Also dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).—VICTOR SHAW, Loring, Alaska.

Canada Part 1 *New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island.* Also homesteading in Canada Part 1, and fur farming.—FRED L. BOWDEN, 5 Howard Avenue, Binghamton, New York.

✠**Canada Part 2** *Southeastern Quebec.* JAS. F. BELFORD, Codrington, Ont., Canada.

✠**Canada Part 3** *Height of Land Region, Northern Ontario and Northern Quebec, Southeastern Ungava and Keewatin.* Trips for Sport and Adventure—big game, fishing, canoeing, Northland travel, also H. B. Company Posts, Indian tribes and present conditions.—S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), 1805 Stroh Building, Detroit, Michigan.

✠**Canada Part 4** *Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario.*—HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., Canada.

✠**Canada Part 5** *Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario.* Also national parks.—A. D. ROBINSON, 115 Huron St., Walkerville, Ont., Canada.

Canada Part 6 *Hunters Island and English River District.*—T. F. PHILLIPS, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn.

Canada Part 7 *Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta.* Also yachting.—C. PLOWDEN, Plowden Bay, Howe Sound, B. C.

Canada Part 8 *The Northw. Ter. and the Arctic, especially Ellesmere Land, Baffinland, Melville and North Devon Islands, North Greenland and the half-explored islands west of Ellesmere.*—PATRICK LEE, c/o William H. Souls, 1481 Beacon St., Boston, Massachusetts.

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Alaska. Also mountain climbing.—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 4821 Lemon Grove Ave., Hollywood, Calif.

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Western U. S. Part 4 *Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains.*— FRED W. EGELSTON, Mina, Nevada.

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Eastern U. S. Part 1 *Eastern Maine. For all territory east of the Penobscot River.*—H. B. STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Me.

Eastern U. S. Part 2 *Western Maine. For all territory west of the Penobscot River.*—DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 70 Main Street, Bangor, Me.

Eastern U. S. Part 3 *Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I. and Mass.*—HOWARD R. VOIGHT, P. O. Box 1332, New Haven, Conn.

Eastern U. S. Part 4 *Adirondacks, New York.*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

Eastern U. S. Part 5 *Maryland and District of Columbia.* Also historical places.—LAWRENCE EDMUND ALLEN, 1505 C St. S. E., Washington, D. C.

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★ *(Enclose addressed envelop with International Reply Coupon for five cents.)*
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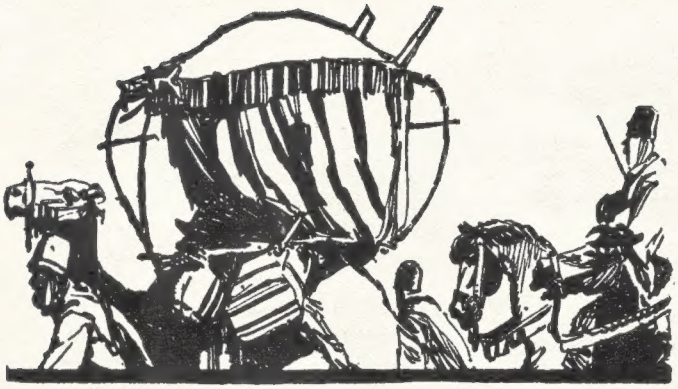

The TRAIL AHEAD

The next issue of
ADVENTURE

Beginning

In The Year 2000

By Arthur O. Friel

Do you remember "The King of No Man's Land" and "Tiger River", in which the adventurers, *McKay, Knowlton* and *Rand* set up a kingdom in the throbbing jungles of the Orinoco? In this absorbing new novel the author describes the even more exciting experiences of the grandson of *McKay* in this far and mysterious land.

THREE COMPLETE NOVELETTES

The Bloody Decks of Every

By H. Bedford-Jones

How by a trick of fate young *Willingham*, having walked the plank of the great pirate *Every*, lived to become a lieutenant of that red sea rover and to wield a cutlas for him in the sack of the Grand Mogul.

Inco

By Georges Surdez

A story of the the fierce and warring tribesmen of the North African deserts and the riff-raff of the French Colonial troops, who were deemed worthless—till it came time to fight to the death for their flag.

Misfortune Hunters

By Thomson Burtis

Slim Evans, lank lieutenant of the Border Air Patrol, runs into a snug little conspiracy to fly smuggled dope in from Mexico.

And—*Other Good Stories*

SIX POUNDS OF FURY, a Swede blacksmith and his mighty hammer, by HAL FIELD LESLIE; BETELNUT, the last story by this favorite *Adventure* author, CHARLES VICTOR FISCHER; COURAGE, an arrow, a bullet and a great Kadiak bear, FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE; HANK JOINS THE VIJILUNTYS, letters of a wandering partner, by ALAN LEMAY; ADVENTURE'S ABYSSINIAN EXPEDITION, notes along the trail, by GORDON MACCREAGH; LEAD—NO GRIT, a story of an Alaskan man hunt, by DEX VOLNEY.

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